MYLES KENNEDY

SLASH'S BANDMATE TELLS US WHY HE'S FINALLY FOLLOWED HIS ACOUSTIC DREAM

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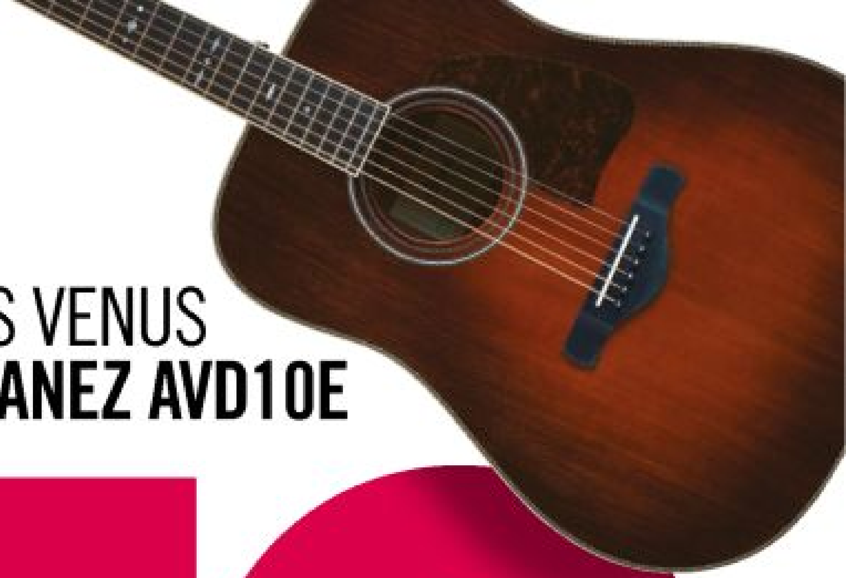

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VINTAGE GUITARS
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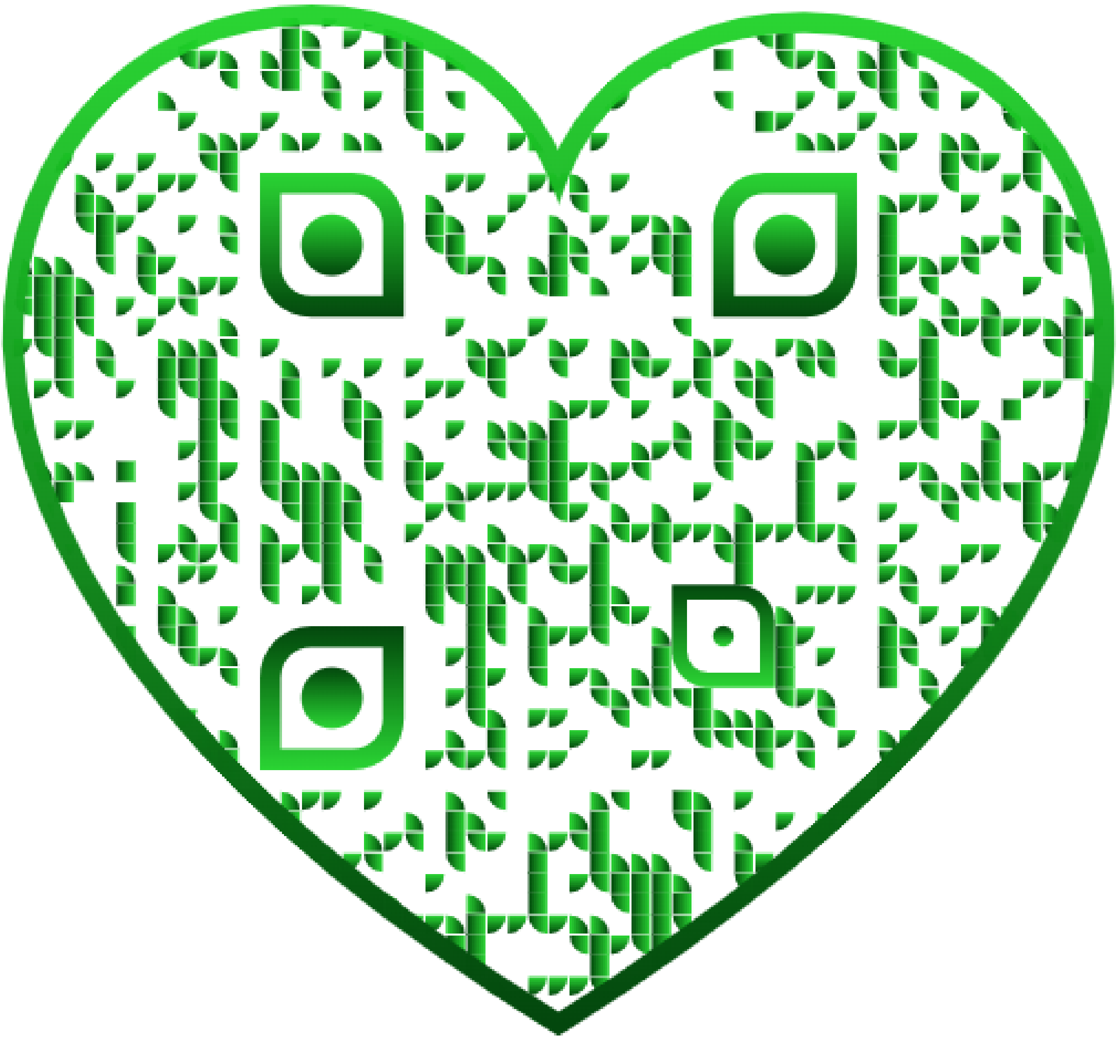

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THE ROOT NOTE

With an extremely heavy heart, I must announce that this will be the last issue of *Acoustic*.

While readership numbers have stayed strong – something which I offer my gratitude to you loyal readers for – *Acoustic* is part of a larger group of magazines including the excellent *Guitarist*, *Total Guitar*, *Guitar Techniques* and *Guitarist Presents Acoustic*. With so much choice for advertisers it seems that something had to give...

Similarly, with guitar giant Gibson in hot water (see news) and bricks-and-mortar retailers losing out to corporate online giants, it seems the whole infrastructure is changing. And when manufacturers, distributors and retailers do part with money to spend on adverts, it's easy to see why they go with the largest titles, rather than the smaller, niche mags like *Acoustic*. So, there you have it. The end of an era. But who knows? Our publishers have guaranteed it will review things and *Acoustic* magazine might well have another chapter left in it yet.

On the day I sit to write this column, though, Levellers, our cover stars, announced that drummer Charlie Heather's 15-year-old son, Alfie Harbord, has been killed after he was hit by a seafront bus in Brighton.

Charlie, from everyone here at *Acoustic*, our hearts go out to you and the family. Take care during this awful time.

A tragedy like that certainly puts things into perspective. I hope Levellers new all-acoustic record and tour will go ahead at some point. The new album really is awesome and, when we sat in on rehearsals for the acoustic tour, the band were sounding incredible.

Apologies to start the magazine with so many sad notes. The good news is we've got some rip-roaring interview features, gear reviews, history, hijinks, and tuition from the masters for our final issue. From here on in I hope you at least check out our other magazines as a potential *Acoustic* alternative. But let's go out on a high, get stuck in and keep on playing and jamming. Let's keep guitar music alive!

It's been a real honour and pleasure to be the Editor of this magazine. And, again, thank you all so much for your continued support.

A big thanks to all the contributors over the years and, of course, to our little permanent team: Kate Puttick and Marcus Faint.

For one final time... Enjoy this issue!

Dan Hobson
Editor

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Contents

ISSUE 142 APRIL 2018

Interviews

LEVELLERS **38**

MYLES KENNEDY **12**

LILLY HIATT **16**

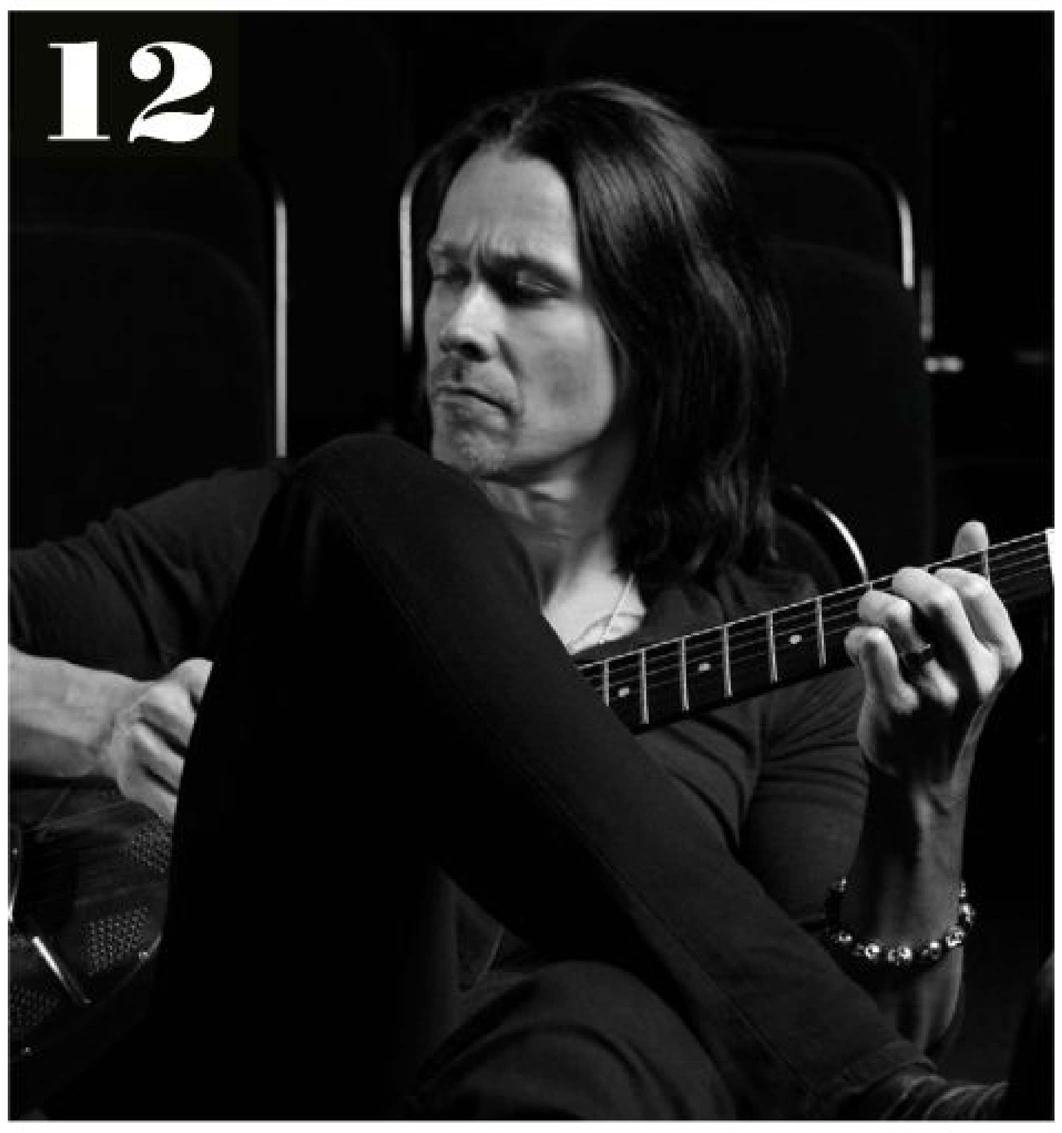
LOUIS BRENNAN **20**

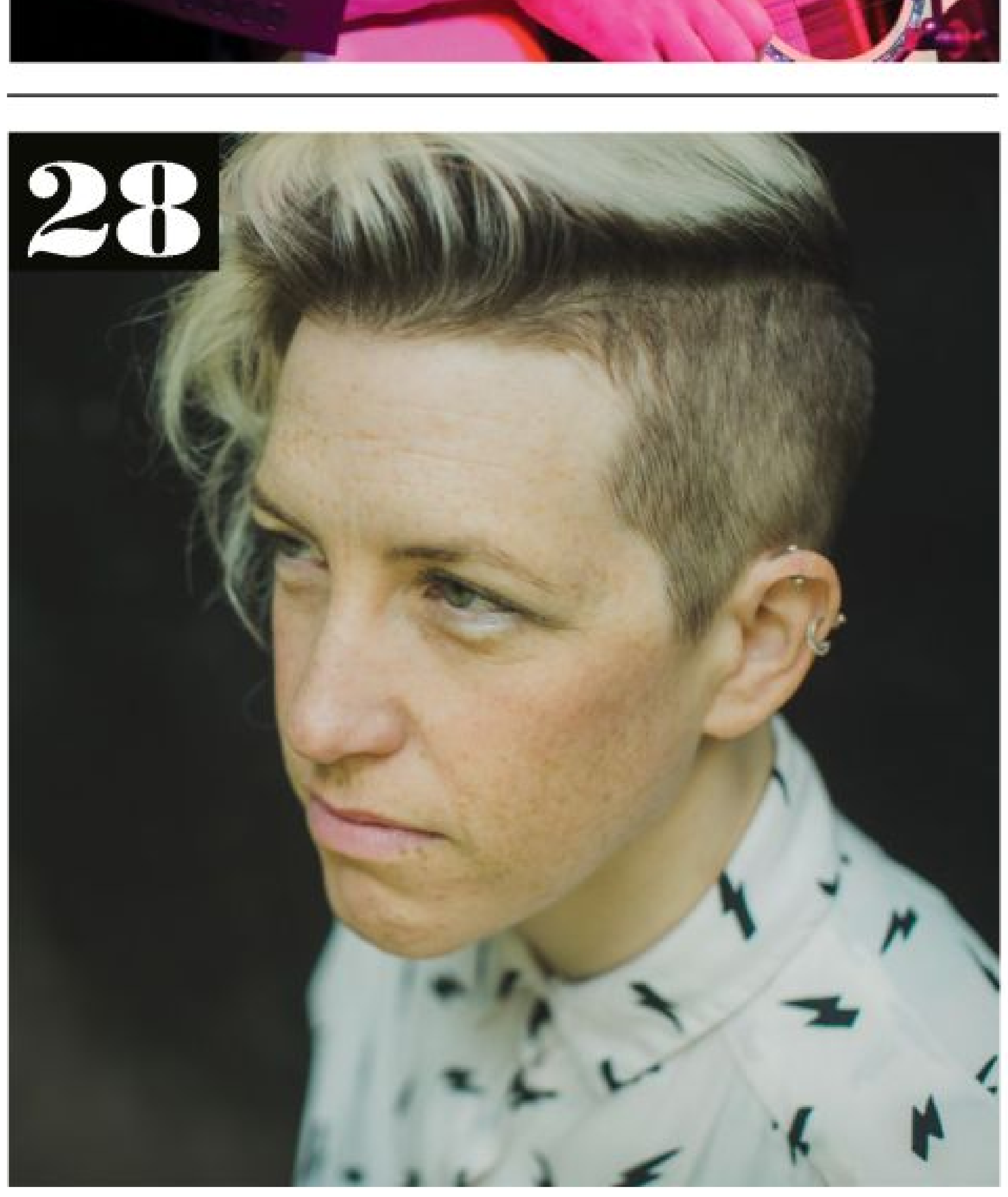
PORT CITIES **24**

YOU ARE WOLF **28**

VAN WILLIAM **30**

FINDLAY BROWN **36**





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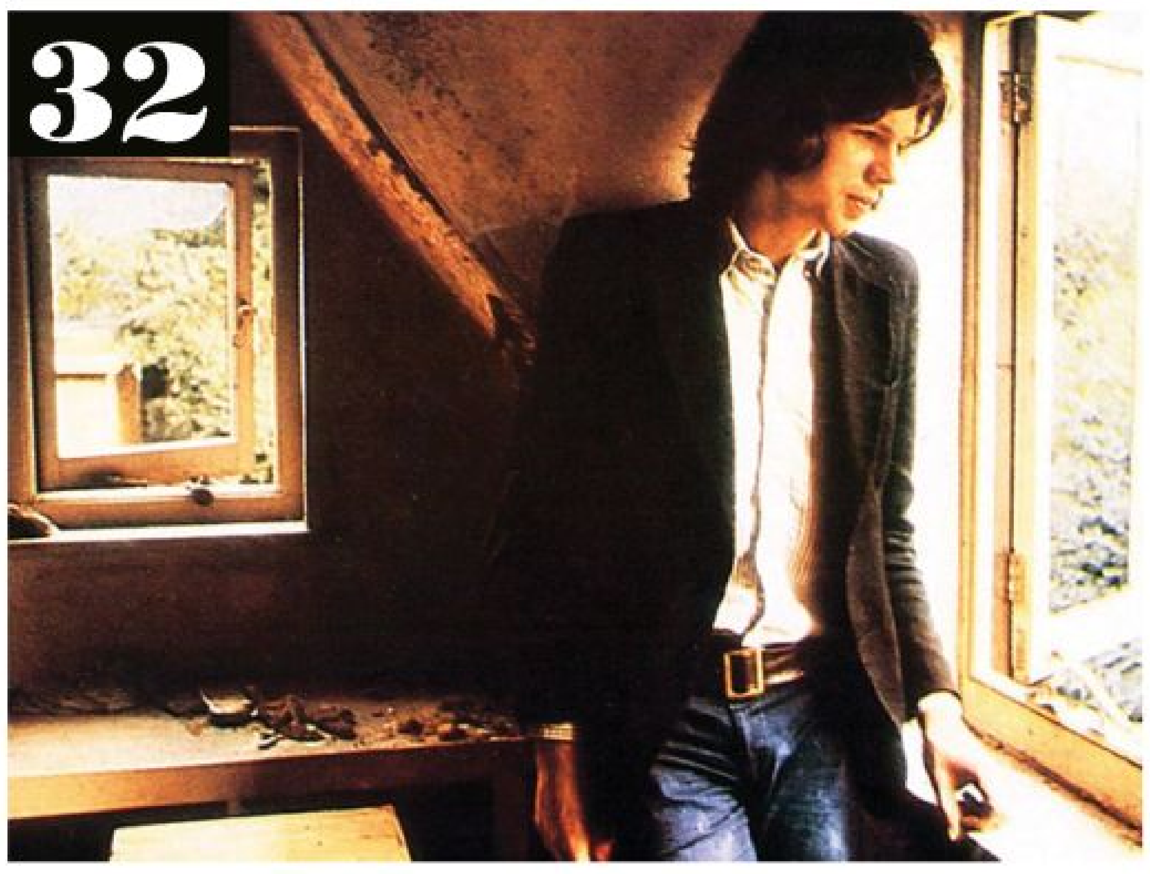

Features

NEWS 8

THE MUSICIAN'S UNION 11

NICK DRAKE REMEMBERED 32

SIX-STRING STORIES 34

VINTAGE GUITARS: PAUL BRETT 46

GUITAR-MAKING: IN THE WORKSHOP 68

GUITAR-MAKING: NICK BENJAMIN 70

NEW MUSIC: CD REVIEWS 72

NEW MUSIC: RETUNE YOUR EARS 76

LEGENDS: BOB DYLAN 98

Gear

On the market for new kit? Every month our team of expert reviewers run the rule over the latest models

IBANEZ AVD10E 48

PRS SE T40E 52

FAITH NEXUS VENUS CUTAWAY ELECTRO COGNAC 56

MESA/BOOGIE AR2X ACOUSTIC ROSETTE 60

FENDER MONTECITO UKELELE 64

Techniques

Bitesize nuggets of ukulele, mandolin, banjo, classical, slide or just plain old acoustic guitar wisdom from our team of world-class players

GORDON GILTRAP 82

CHRIS GIBBONS 86

ROCKSCHOOL 88

RICHARD GILEWITZ 90

SIMON MAYOR 92

MIKE DAWES 94

RAYMOND BURLEY 96

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ACOUSTIC NEWS DESK

FOR THE LATEST NEWS VISIT **WWW.ACOUSTICMAGAZINE.COM**

TROUBLED TIMES FOR GIBSON?

It has been a trying month for guitar giant Gibson, with early whispers about a possible collapse giving way to a more official response that it may be a little more complicated than that.

At time of writing, the short story was that, though some of its current brands may well end up leaving the group or disappearing entirely, and that the company intended on "eliminating product segments that do not perform to our expectations and have little upside in the future", it had "met all current obligations to the bondholders".

Gibson has 100 brand names in its roster including Epiphone, Dobro, Maestro, Hamilton and many more.

This strategy, among other plans, will, according to a statement by Gibson, "lead to the best financial results the company has seen in its history within the next year... and an ability to pay back the company's debt in whole within several years."

CEO Henry Juszkiewicz detailed the plans further, stating, "By monetizing assets, we can reduce debt and generate funds to contribute to business segments that are thriving. It is important to our business to get back to the financial success we had, to achieve the best financial terms in the refinancing of our company."

RETAILERS' ANXIETY

The CEO had some fearful words regarding the forecast for other guitar businesses focusing on footfall rather than online sales: "All of the retailers are fearful as can be; they're all afraid of e-commerce, with Amazon just becoming the second largest employer in the US, and the brick and mortar guys are just panicking," Juszkiewicz told the US-based *Billboard* news site. "They see the trend, and that trend isn't taking them to a good place, and they're all wondering if there will be a world for brick and mortar stores for much longer. It's a turbulent world to be a retailer, and many of our retail partners are facing that same issue," he added.

FURCH - NEW RANGE

Listen with your eyes! Czech brand Furch have announced a colourful new range of acoustics, with a new naming series listing models after colours of the rainbow, as a replacement to the current Millennium models. Not just wordsmithery, the guitar makers also promise first-class sound: "Every Color Series guitar is crafted using proprietary state-of-the-art technologies that include soundboard voicing, which tunes the top plate to achieve unrivalled acoustic properties, highly consistent ultra-thin finish, and high-precision robotic polishing."

They also boast the use of Furch CNR System, a neck design that allows the neck relief to be adjusted with an 'unsurpassed' degree of accuracy.

Info: www.furchguitars.com

ACOUSTIC WUNDERKIND

Teenage *Guitar Star* finalist Billy Watman has released a six-track instrumental EP "CRYPTIC" featuring original compositions and covers – including an all-guitar version of Mike Oldfield's 'Tubular Bells Pt 1'.

Since his success on the Sky Arts TV show, Billy's online videos have attracted more than 50 million views, he has supported Jon Gomm at London's Bush Hall, and has taken his genre defying solo guitar show around the UK.

This year he will be performing at 'The Acoustic Festival of Britain' and 'Llyn Guitar Festival' amongst others.

Info: www.billywatman.com

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BEN HARPER & CHARLIE MUSSELWHITE – UK DATES

Grammy-award winning, multiplatinum-selling artists Ben Harper and Charlie Musselwhite have teamed up again for an already critically acclaimed album – *No Mercy in This Land* – and will visit the UK to perform it, it has been announced.

Described as a deeply personal work, for both artists, the title track is particularly poignant for Musselwhite, as it captures the emotional loss he experienced when his mother was murdered. "It's the essence of blues," he explains. "To me it's about feeling. And that feeling there is pure."

Harper adds, "With Charlie, some things I pick up on are spoken and some are unspoken, but we know a lot about each other. But the deepest part of our friendship doesn't need to be said."

The album is the second full-length collaboration between the pair since Harper's slick guitar-playing met Musselwhite's primal, rootsy harmonica-led blues in 2013's award-winning *Get Up!*

It's safe to say the pair have nothing but respect for one another's work. Musselwhite told *Rolling Stone*, "I think it is safe to say that Ben has reinvented the blues in a great way: playing modern while preserving the feel."

The album is currently available for pre-order now and will include an IG download of the album's title track, which is also available to stream.

The duo will visit the UK in April as part of a wider international tour:

- **Tuesday 3 April - Oran Mor - Glasgow**
- **Friday 6 April - Academy 2 - Manchester**
- **Saturday 7 April - Shepherd's Bush Empire - London**

Info: www.nomercyinthisland.com/#tour

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30 YEARS OF MARY

Mary Chapin Carpenter celebrates 30 years in the business this month with the release of new album, *Sometimes Just The Sky*, featuring new versions of some of Carpenter's most beloved songs. The 13-track album was recorded entirely live at Peter Gabriel's Real World Studios outside Bath, produced by Ethan Johns (Ryan Adams, Paul McCartney, Ray LaMontagne).

Of the album title Carpenter says, "I read a beautiful interview with Patti Smith in which she said that you don't have to look far or wide… to find things to soothe you in life, or to be happy about. Sometimes just the sky makes everything fall into perspective."

The five-time Grammy-winner – and one of only 15 female members of the Nashville Songwriters Hall of Fame – will tour the UK in May, alongside special guest performer Emily Barker, winner of the UK Artist of the Year award at the recent UK Americana Awards.

Info: http://smarturl.it/mcc-justthesky

FRANK TURNER, WILL VARLEY & BEANS ON TOAST PODCAST

Independent label Xtra Mile Recordings have released the first instalment of their new podcast series 'The Xtra Yard' featuring their label signings in conversation. This first episode features label mates – and recent *Acoustic* interviewees – Frank Turner, Will Varley and Beans on Toast discussing Townes Van Zandt, Bruce Springsteen and a million other topics.

'The Xtra Yard' podcast will include exciting sneak peeks at upcoming material from the trio. Varley has just released his new album *Spirit Of Minnie* and headlined London's Shepherd's Bush Empire, Frank Turner has just announced details of his forthcoming seventh album, entitled *Be More Kind* (out in May) and 120-date world tour and Beans On Toast released his ninth album *Cushty* late last year.

Tracks from all their new studio albums also feature within the podcast.

Info: https://xmrpodcast.lnk.to/xtrayard

LEARNING APP

Fender Play, the guitar giant's subscription-based digital guitar learning platform, is now available on Android and iPad devices.

The iPad version adds portrait and landscape modes, chord charts and related lessons, plus an updated course view. Fender is also set to expand the platform with ukulele and bass lessons, plus R&B and metal genre paths later on in 2018.

Info: https://apple.co/2FCq1QA

TRAVEL NEWS

Plenty of guitars purport to be travel-friendly - but the Notekase is perhaps the first to double as a suitcase.

Newly launched on Kickstarter, the Notekase features a breakdown neck joint and a backing plate, which can be rotated to fit inside the sounding board surface. The whole lot slots inside a luggage case.

The guitar features a roughly dreadnought-proportioned body with options including fanned frets and nylon-string classical styles.

Irish designer Iain Maclean came up with the Notekase to get around European budget airline policies, which state that musical instruments require a €60 fee.

Available now from Kickstarter, from €280 (standard model)

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ASK THE EXPERTS

MUSIC CENSUS SHOWS SMALL VENUES ARE GOOD FOR PEOPLE

The Musicians' Union (MU) was delighted to host the launch of the UK's first Live Music Census report. Taking a snapshot of 24 hours of live performances in some of the UK's biggest music cities – Glasgow, Newcastle-Gateshead, Oxford, Brighton, Leeds and Southampton – and combining it with survey data, the census digs deep into the economic, social and cultural value of small venues, and the challenges facing both the venues and the musicians who work in them.

LIVE MUSIC HAS A SIGNIFICANT VALUE

And the census found plenty of statistics to back that up. In Glasgow, for example, the total annual spend on live music is around £78.8 million. That means about £36.6 million in Gross Value Added (GVA, the amount it contributes to Gross Domestic Product) and about 2,450 full-time equivalent jobs.

FOR MUSICIANS AND THE UK ECONOMY

Professional musicians who took part in the census said that, on average 49 per cent of their annual income comes from performing live compared to 3 per cent from recorded music. The census also showed that 67 per cent musicians surveyed performed in small venues and 64 per cent performed in bars and clubs in the 12 months prior to the survey. For emerging artists, the numbers are higher with 78 per cent reporting that they performed in both.

SMALL VENUES ARE GOOD FOR EVERYONE

Live music enhances social bonding, can improve mood, health, wellbeing, and is a formative part of many people's identity. But it has other social benefits. Over half of venues and promoters surveyed said they have links with universities, colleges and other education organisations.

BUT SMALL VENUES AND THE MUSICIANS WHO PERFORM IN THEM STILL FACE CHALLENGES

For venues, the big challenges are business rates, planning and property development, noise-related complaints, and increasing competition between venues and promoters.

For musicians, however there is one big challenge that appears to eclipse all others; stagnating pay. Some 68 per cent musicians surveyed said stagnating pay makes it a challenge to earn a viable living from gigging in small venues. That number goes up to 80 per cent for professional musicians.

Over half of professional musicians surveyed reported working for free in the 12 months prior – 54 per cent in fact. Two-thirds musicians said they had worked unpaid in exchange for "exposure", but feel that the promised exposure did not benefit their career.

IT'S NOT ALL DOOM AND GLOOM

In fact, 2018 has been a pretty good year for the future of grassroots venues across the UK. We've won the fight for Agent of Change in England and Scotland. It's a principle in law that makes the person who creates a change (like a developer) responsible for mitigating its effects (for example using proper soundproofing in order to protect adjacent venues from noise complaints).

There's still more to do – from making sure Agent of Change is implemented properly to continuing the fight for fair pay for musicians.

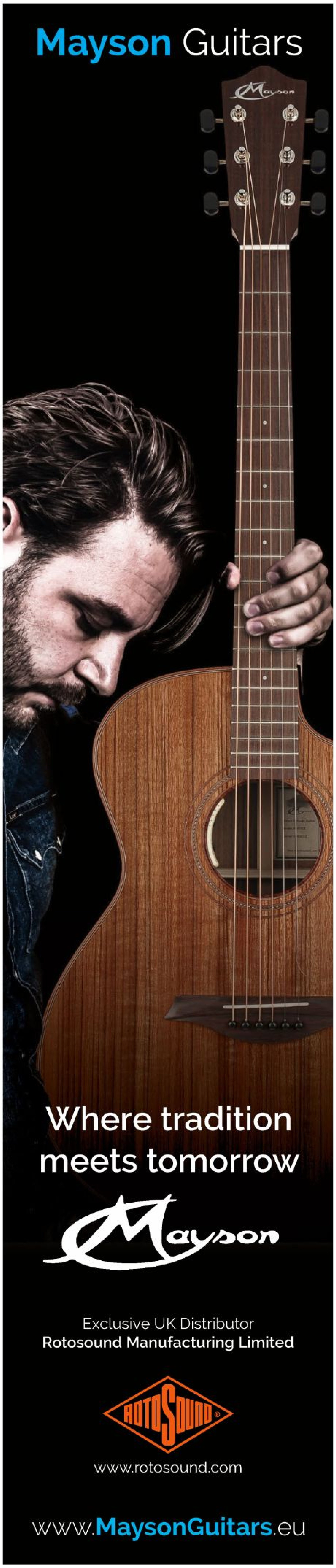
LUCKILY, THERE IS A WAY YOU CAN HELP

Love music? Keep an eye out on Twitter and Instagram (@WeAreTheMU) and Facebook (facebook.com/musicians.union) for the latest campaigns news and actions from the MU.

As it's the last edition of Acoustic, we have to end with a few thank yous. Thanks to Dan and the team at Acoustic for their ongoing support.

And thank you for reading. It has been a pleasure sharing what we know with you, and we hope you've found the advice useful.

To find out more about what we do, there's plenty more information available via theMU.org covering every aspect of working in the music industry, and you can always tweet us your questions @WeAreTheMU. Good luck from all of us! ■



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MYLES KENNEDY

Alter Bridge frontman Myles Kennedy tells Hywel Davies about his debut solo album – his most vulnerable musical work to date

"Lyrics tend to hide behind a certain amount of ambiguity and symbolism but these songs are almost like open letters to my father. I expose a lot of me here to the point where I would ask myself, 'Is this the right way to do this?'"

You may think you know Alter Bridge frontman Myles Kennedy, but his debut solo album *Year Of The Tiger* shows a side that many on the arena rock circuit would rather you never know about. After decades of inner turmoil, it was finally time to address the past and lay it to rest.

Written from the ashes of a previously unreleased solo album, *Year Of The Tiger* is his first official solo release to date. Autobiographically structured, one of the key themes that he addresses is the loss of his biological father Richard Bass, who passed away from illness when the singer was only four years old. Kennedy has spent his whole life sitting on the frustration to his father's decision to not seek medical attention due to his religious beliefs. When *Acoustic* chatted to him back in January, we attentively asked about how these events culminated into this album. A testament to his character, it's a question he's more than happy to answer despite the gravity behind it.

"We were initially a Christian Science family and he was very devoted. I don't know where it stands now, but last I checked they don't believe in seeing doctors and he chose not to get medical attention and passed away. This whole record deals with that and it deals with how my mom forged her own strength and persevered with two little boys in tow. It's essentially a concept record in that regard and basically tells the story of our journey after dad passed away.

"So, it starts with the song 'Year Of The Tiger' and that lyric is really interesting because I came up with most of that melody and that lyric years ago," he says. "I was just mowing my lawn or something and I heard that somewhere, wrote it down, and I didn't really know what it meant. When I started putting this record together, I had some musical ideas but I wasn't sure where I was going to go from a thematic stand point. But when I discovered the year of the tiger was actually the same year that my father passed away, I decided that this was the time to deal with that whole situation and address that in a record. At first, I wasn't sure I was going to do a whole record that related to that theme or just a few songs, but once I discovered that

"I knew I needed to get this off my chest"

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the way I felt about my dad was a combination of all these different things, I knew I needed to get it off my chest… Initially I wanted to make sure that these songs stood on their own in any environment with just an acoustic guitar all by myself. That was very important to me. I initially flirted with the idea of recording the album with just me in a room with the songs, but when I started talking with 'Elvis' [Michael Baskette] my producer, we agreed that a less is more approach was the way to go. Keeping things organic and just create the holes where you could put in the mandolin or banjo part. We made sure it wasn't this overdone wall of sound."

From what he tells us, Kennedy could easily open a museum with the number of vintage acoustics he uses on the record. When we ask about the instruments he used for the album, one particular Gibson certainly made an impression and seems to have been love at first sight, as he explains: "I used a lot of older guitars that I've collected over the years for this album. But the most inspiring instrument that's on this entire record was the guitar that a friend of mine came across. He works at a pawn shop in Spokane [Washington], where I live. He calls me up and was like, 'Man, you've got to come here and hear this guitar.' It was a 1944 Gibson J-45 and when I started playing it, I took it home right there on the spot. I couldn't stop writing songs on it, it's such an inspiring instrument. As far as resonators go, I believe the one I use is a 1930 National Triolian. I did a fair amount of recording with those along with a 1945 Martin 000-21. Those were the go-to acoustic instruments and because I'm using altered tunings on this record, I needed an assortment of guitars to pull from."

From traditional Americana to blues rock, Kennedy was free to stretch his creative muscles to previously untouched and relatively unatonable territories given the heavier nature of his other bands. What sort of tunings and styles does he play around with on the album, we ask?

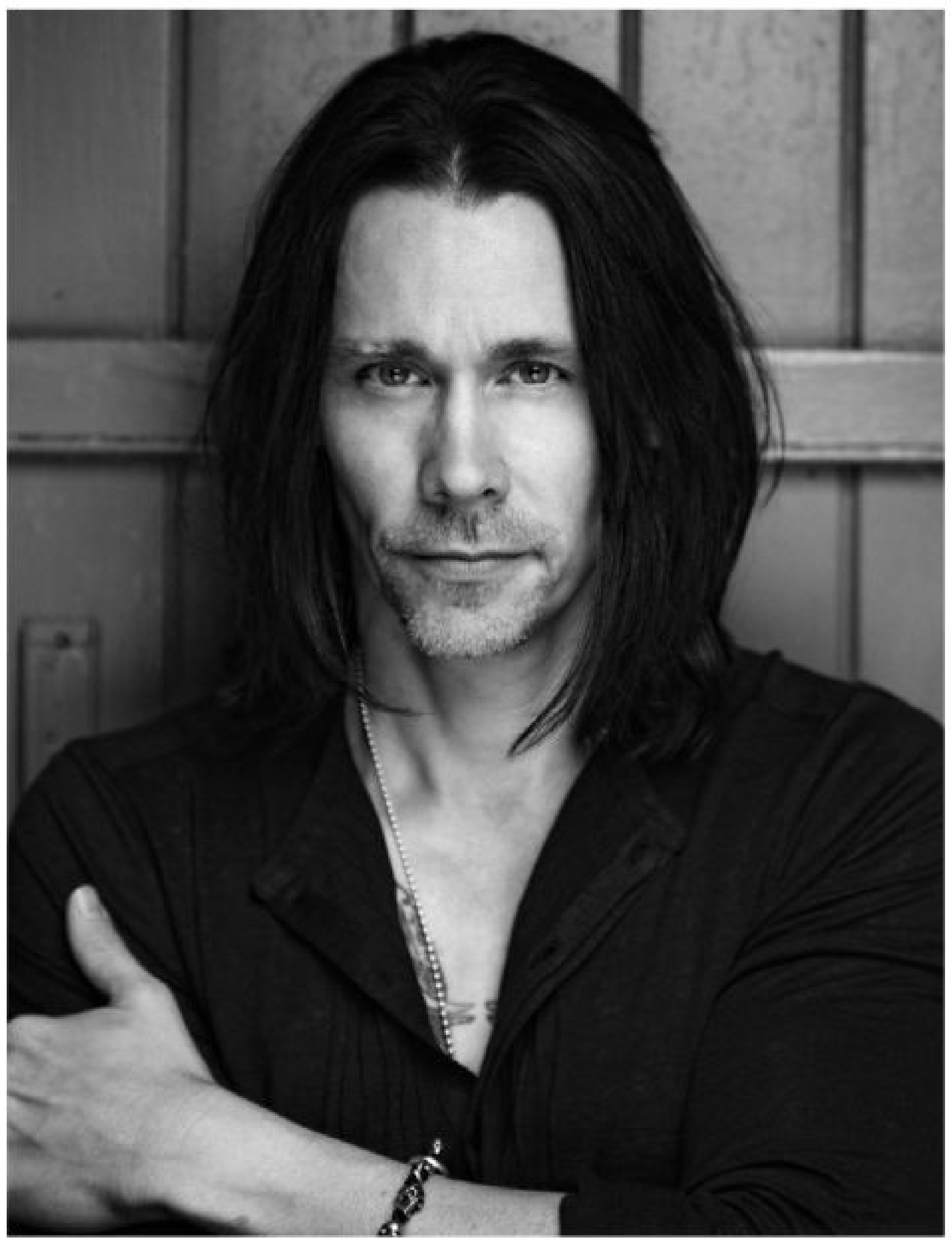
"Oh man, I was messing around with a number of different ones. Some of the ones I don't even know the names of. Open G is usually my go-to, but I actually didn't use that one a lot on this record. I used some

“Some of the tunings I used on the album I don’t even know the names of”

interesting variations off of C tunings. In fact, that J-45 worked well with a C, G, C, F, C, Eb tuning, which is kind of like a C minor essentially. Then I played around with another one which was C, G, C, G, C, D. Then on the resonator I used a D, A, D, A, A, D, like a D5 tuning more or less.

“I think obviously Jimmy Page was a big part of where this style came from,” he explains. “I remember banging my head against the wall as a kid trying to figure out ‘Friends’ off of Led Zeppelin II and was like, ‘What the heck is he doing in his tuning area?’ And then someone showed me what he was doing and then I was off to the races.

“I couldn’t utilise this approach with Alter Bridge. It just wouldn’t work because we’re a hard rock band,” he says, describing the creative leap from band to solo work. “So, it just seems like if I was going to make a solo record I knew I wanted it to express all these different styles, and it was a chance to paint with different colours. It was strangely liberating and a very healthy thing for me to do creatively and hopefully I’ll be able to do it again at some point in my career. What I’ve learnt through this whole process is that if you do something that you really love that comes from an honest place; if you really want to express something that’s hiding inside of you that’s trying to get out, you’ve just got to follow your gut and follow your instincts. It’s extremely rewarding once you do that. I can step back now and know that this body of work represents the musical pride of my DNA. I’m very happy with that and proud to have taken the initiative to document that while I’m still on this planet.”



When asked if this album has tightened his bond with the guitar, his tone is elevated to an almost childlike excitement. As enthusiastic now as he was back when he was still playing air guitar with a tennis racket – he admits to us – throughout his career his passion for the instrument has never waned.

“It’s my first love! I mean, I’m still as in love with the instrument as I was the day I discovered it. It’s just an incredible instrument and as a songwriting tool it’s wonderful. That’s one of the really empowering things about the guitar for me, it was discovering that I could write songs with it. I remember I cleaned horse manure for nine months to save up the money to get this Ibanez X-Series, I think that it was a DT250 guitar. It was the first guitar that I really wanted. It was a big deal when I finally got to take it home. Unfortunately, it got stolen from me about two years later. I left it at my high school to go see a concert that night because I didn’t want to take it in with me just in case somebody stole it. So, that was kind of a drag,” he laughs. “I’m still looking for that guitar by the way.” We’ll be sure to keep a lookout for it. ■

***Year Of The Tiger* is out March 9 via Napalm. Info: https://myleskennedy.com**

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LILLY HIATT

From Pearl Jam to country-tinged Americana is quite a quantum leap, but at heart, Lilly Hiatt admits to Julian Piper, she's still a rocker

Lilly Hiatt is sounding bubbly as she describes a balmy afternoon in Nashville. "Pretty nice for winter," she laughs. "The South has a specific way of being gloomy when it gets tough, but right now it's lovely."

It can never be easy being the scion of a 'star', and when your father happens to be John Hiatt, arguably one of the greatest songwriters of his generation, inevitably the expectations – all round – are bound to be immense. Lilly Hiatt's new album *Trinity Lane* is her third, and in the years since her first album *Let Down* was released in 2012, her sound has morphed via light country and the Human League, to what is essentially a rock album. But her songs exude the same confessional warmth of many of her father's finest moments; she has a way of nailing the human condition without ever sounding maudlin, even – as in this case – when the subject of the songs happen to be about herself, and the pain of crawling back after a wrecked relationship. There are tinges of country to the album – after all, the girl does live in Nashville – but it's the rock edge that wins out, something that dates back to Lilly's long held admiration for Pearl Jam.

"Yeah I've always loved that band; at a young age I used to watch myself in the mirror and mouth to their songs. All I wanted to do was play some kind of edgy hard core grungy music!"

Home, to Lilly Hiatt is the burgeoning creative hub of East Nashville; the album's named after her street.

"It's a really cool part of town to live in and I've been living here about four years; all of Nashville is a very interesting city, but the East side is where the more artistic people tend to gravitate," she says.

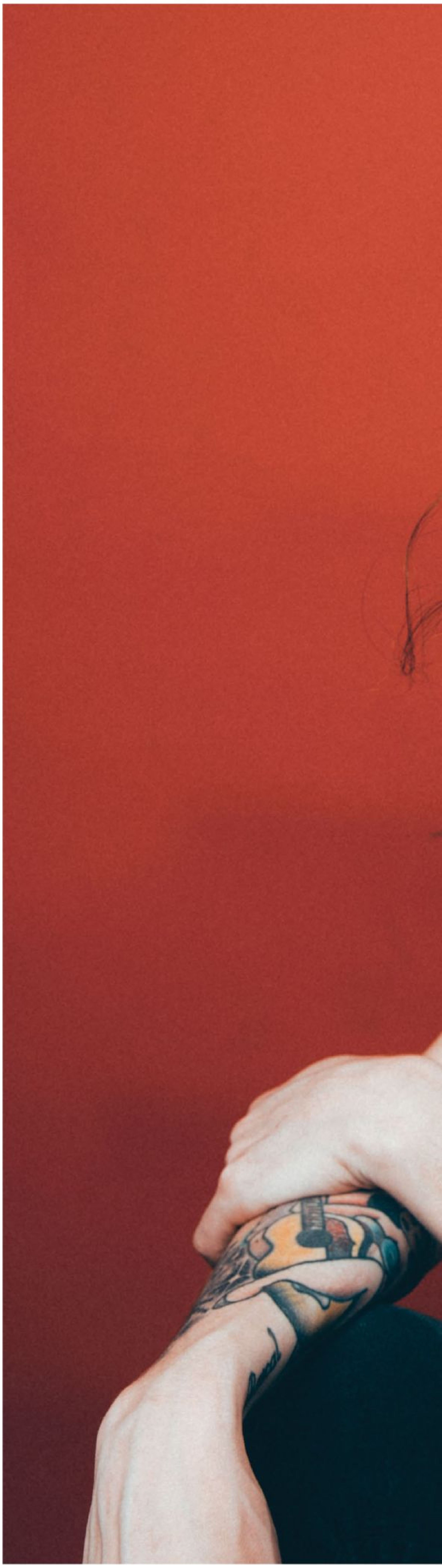
"Obviously there's a lot of competition and there're so many people playing music, that it's a hard town to get a gig in. It's something I forget until I talk to other people dying to get a gig somewhere, and I remember, 'Oh yes, I've been in the same situation.' But I've always been vying for Nashville's approval, and the best thing is when they get into you.

"Because it's an inspiring place with a lot of really warm, creative people, there's a real sense of community, and people come here and work really hard to be noticed. People are very supportive of each other, get excited about things, and there's that whole thing of Southern hospitality. Strangely, of course, most people aren't from here, but there's still that Southern thing of being kind, open and warm to everyone. I also think that anyone who's been working hard knows what it takes, and it takes help. I've had a lot of people, really great musicians, help me because they believed in what I was doing.

"When I was living in Austin, someone would come up and say, 'Oh you're from Nashville; do you have to pay for people to practise with you there?' Not the people I play with, I've just been lucky in finding great people who enjoy playing music," she says. "Looking back I guess the bar was always super high."

So how was it being John Hiatt's little girl? Did she feel there was a huge weight resting on her shoulders? "I think any expectations about what I would do came from me rather than him, I'm very self-critical and it's taken me a long time to record. Looking back I guess

"I've always been vying for Nashville's approval"



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"My first guitar was a Martin parlour guitar from my dad, which I immediately covered with Pearl Jam stickers. It's the guitar I write all my songs on. When I play electrically with my band I use a Rickenbacker. It took a little time to adjust to playing electric, but my guitarist John Condit suggested I try a Rickenbacker, because you can strum it in the same way as an acoustic; it's a lot of fun to play. I get really excited thinking about how something will sound with the band – live, I use a Gibson Custom Mini J200 (pictured) – but I also like to write songs that stand on their own, when I'm playing solo."

the bar was always super high, but it's never been because anyone was ever insisting on my producing a super set of songs; it's just the way we are. But of course he's always been a huge influence, his music has been the soundtrack to my life. My dad and I always listened to a lot of music together, and there's always something special about the bond between a father and a daughter. We've always talked a lot about music, and when I'm in a situation I'm really confused about, the business side of things, it's great to have his advice, He comes from the same artistic angle as I do, but you have to know how to navigate that other side of it, and at times like that, it's cool we share the same career.

"There was a lot of pressure on myself when I was younger, to have a career just like his, but as I got older I decided to do what I liked; I realised maybe I'd never have a career like his, and that it didn't matter. But luckily people that love my dad are really open to what I do as well.'

Trinity Lane is an intensely personal album. Some people might find it a problem to bare their soul in this way, I suggest. "I do find it easier to write from a personal place, because that's what I know," she affirms. "Maybe it comes over as being a bit more confessional than writers who channel their feelings through fictional characters. But that's all I know," she laughs. "I have to write songs to cope with stuff, whether that happens to be immediately or months after, it's going to happen. I know it's very introspective and looking inwards, but I'm sure I'll change, have a fulfilling purge!

"I wish I was as cool as the blues guys, but I need to write about beautiful things that make me happy as well. I've lived in a way that was chaotic for ten years, and had a lot of highs and lows that fuelled many songs. But in the last year my life's evened out, and I've lived a bit more of a peaceful existence, everything's been calming down.

"I still have a tendency to make anything sad though," she admits. "I would love to be able to write about happy joyful things as well, but it's hard to write a happy song without sounding cheesy! I always loved the Staple Singers song 'Respect Yourself', a very happy, empowering song, with nothing painful about it, but I still have this preference for melancholy things and chord sequences. Minor chord gloom, that's why I always slip them in as the second or third chord!"

But a lot of it comes back to Neil Young; he's always been a huge favourite, and he always had this element style to what he does. So that even the sweetest song has a sadness to it."

Lilly agrees that she's gone through a lot of musical changes over the last five years.

"Now I see myself as stuck somewhere between the world of rock 'n' roll and singer-songwriter – those two coexist and I don't think there's any need to differentiate. I think my voice has a bit of a growl to it, it's not a contrived thing and I don't know where it comes from, but I guess that's why there's some country in what I do. I don't understand how it's happened but it has. I'm stuck with it!' ■

***Trinity Lane* is out now.**

Info: www.lillyhiatt.com

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LOUIS BRENNAN

After a nightmarish beginning, Louis Brennan's music is finally getting the recognition it deserves. George Henry King joined the folk star for a frank chat

After a lengthy dispute with a record label culminated in the imprisonment of an entire album's worth of material, folk troubadour Louis Brennan quit his job and banished himself from the world of music in which he had operated since his voyage from Dublin to London. During a much-needed sabbatical, he set out to re-inflate his otherwise deflated desire to write and perform, and before long, his love for the "art of songwriting and storytelling", proved a force too strong to repel. And following the purchase of a Faith acoustic guitar, his musical mojo had been reinstated, and his never-before-known artistic and personal identities, that had thus far been suppressed and stifled, had been unearthed.

A debut album oozing with social commentary delivered with a wry sense of humour beckoned as a result, and it wasn't long until Brennan's *Dead Capital*, was very much alive – and we had more than a few questions...

Your debut, solo album, *Dead Capital*, was released in February. Where and when was it recorded, and with whom?

It was recorded a year ago in Berlin, Germany in a studio called Candy Bomber Studios, which is run by Ingo Krauss who is quite an eccentric German guy. The guys who play on the record were all people I've played with before and the last year was just spent tying the loose ends together, getting it mixed and mastered, making videos and trying to do it ahead of steam.

It was recorded live using vintage microphones and a mixing desk built in the 1950s. As a result of recording in this way and using vintage equipment, did you capture something that you perhaps wouldn't have done had you have recorded in a more modern way?

Yeah, definitely. Well, it was a documentary experience that was trying to capture a moment and like Bob Dylan always said, the records are one thing, but the songs have their own life and they live onstage every night. So, the intention of the record was to capture the songs in that moment and a lot of them were done before in terms of the arrangements and I had done quite a bit of demoing, but the magic that kind of happens from the mistakes and the quirks... you can't really engineer that.

What are the core themes that run through your album?

Alienation is a big theme that runs through

> **"Magic that comes from mistakes... you can't engineer that"**

the record. I think a lot of people find themselves looking at the world in a very abstract way and they are not really sure of what their place is within it – particularly at the moment with the diffusion of the whole new type of mass media where truth and fact is a very arbitrary thing. So, the title *Dead Capital* was slightly linked to that, but it partially refers to an economic turn of phrase, essentially relating to a lot of people within the developing world who are incapable of lifting themselves out of poverty due to the fact that a major part of their assets are outside of the structured property system and therefore it is dead capital, that can't be leveraged. And so, I liked that terminology and how it applies to ideas and how people feel and what their identities are and what their political feelings are. You're told that your ideas, if they are in any way contrary to the norm, are somehow unworkable, and that runs through the record to a certain extent.

Your song, 'Silence', critiques modern society. Do you think we're going in 'the wrong direction', as it were?

I wouldn't say we are going backwards, but there is a kind of tendency on both the left and the right to kind of glorify the past as some kind of utopian idol. But ultimately, 100 years ago in London, poverty was a much more crushing reality. If anything, modern society is just becoming stranger and more abstracted and it's creating a whole new set of problems that wouldn't have occurred in the past purely due to the technological advances. I didn't have a mobile phone until I was 16, but kids from the ages of 4 or 5 use iPads now. That's not necessarily a good thing or a bad thing; it's just very different.

Your album was released on vinyl. What's your opinion on the trend?

I kind of slightly have a split feeling on [vinyl], because obviously you shouldn't need to create a physical, expensive object in order to attribute value to something that isn't the actual physical objective. However, the physical object engenders a different listening experience, and that's not even necessarily about the audio quality, but the ritualistic aspect. Digital music lends itself to playlisting and it's kind of the fast food approach to consuming music. I was reading about Bonnie Prince Billy and why he doesn't release any of his music on any streaming platforms and the reason being is because if people are listening to it on a device, such as a phone or a computer, they are also checking their emails at the same time and that device is

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The first guitar that I had my brother gave to me and it was a black semi-acoustic guitar. The pickup didn't work and it had a really high action and then I played a classical guitar with nylon strings, which was an Ibanez. But I don't have either of those guitars now – I've been through a lot of guitars.

I now have a Faith guitar, which is my main guitar and I've got a Seagull that I've had for years and years that I really like. The Faith I bought about four years ago when I was first really getting back into playing again. It's a parlour guitar and it just really suits my playing style and sounds great. When I first tried it out, I went back about three times and I was like 'Do I really want this? Do I really need this?' but it's become something that I use on everything. I used a few different guitars on the record because it doesn't record very well for strummy kind of stuff, but I don't really do much of that anyway. For fingerstyle and in a live scenario, though, it sounds absolutely fantastic.

multi-purposed. So, the music is a passive experience rather than something you're actively engaging in. So, I think that, if the physical format of vinyl is making a resurgence then it is probably a positive thing because it means that people are getting something and putting it on their hi-fi and hopefully listening to the whole record and engaging with it in a more fulsome way.

When you quit your job, you were quoted as saying that you were eager to re-construct your image as a "precocious and pretentious protagonist". Have you achieved that? What does that mean in terms of your lyrics? Is your musical persona not your real self?

Well, I was describing it to someone the other day in terms of a Venn Diagram. As you grow up, you kind of cultivate different aspects of your personality in order to suit different facets of your life - be it your work life or be it your family life or your artistic life. And I suppose in an ideal situation you're always kind of striving to make the central part of the Venn Diagram larger. But I felt like at a certain point in my life, that had gone into a different direction and things were drifting apart and I was confused as to what my identity was in terms of my artistic identity and there may have been aspects of my personality that I had warehoused and suppressed for quite a long time. So, when I was writing for this project I was conscious of the fact that I didn't have to suppress those things and if anything, I could amplify them. So, any kind of dystopian or nihilistic views that I hold, that I wouldn't express in the public realm on a day-to-day basis, were given a voice.

Most of your songs are fingerpicked on the acoustic guitar. Do you think that, in fingerpicking a guitar, you can communicate something that you couldn't achieve by strumming a guitar?

I like the more kind of textural things you get with fingerpicking and a lot of the songs are deceptively complex and the harmonic compositions don't really lend themselves to strumming. It's just how I've come to play over the years and I don't use a pick or anything these days. When you're playing on your own it gives it a bit more texture and rhythmic variety and it's more dynamic.

In modern, popular music, the art of lyricism sometimes feels lost. Being a songwriter, do you feel a responsibility to be as lyrically descriptive as you can and to use that outlet as a form of social commentary?

I don't feel responsible to do that – I do this for myself and for my own need to express myself more than anything and it's the best way I know to express myself. So, that's not to say other people aren't able to express similar ideas and concepts or feelings using a different medium that isn't necessarily words and lyrics. I suppose in the genre that I operate you like to think that you live and die by your lyrics – although that's not often the case for a lot of my contemporaries. For me it's kind of central to what I do and the uncluttered aspect of it is very intentional and it was with the record, to have the words as the main dish.

You've been likened to Father John Misty and Leonard Cohen and you've stated that you can identify with those artists because they are or were on a journey. Where do you hope the journey you're on will end up taking you?

Well, there is no end point. The destination isn't the prerogative of the journey, the journey is all kind of about... the journey. ■

Dead Capital **is available for preorder now. Info:www.louisbrennanmusic.com**

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PORT CITIES

What happens when you throw a seasoned acoustic troubadour, a jazz pianist and a hip-hop and R&B fan together? Ollie McGhie finds out

© Matt Dunlap

To some this might sound like the start of a musical joke. Will the singer-songwriter be crooning under the piano while R&B recitative weaves in and out of syncopated jazz melodies? It's either going to work or fail abysmally.

Port Cities is one band from Halifax, Nova Scotia, who do this very well, though not in the manner described above. The band comprises Carleton Stone, 32, a veritable singer-songwriter; Breagh Mackinnon, 27, a vocalist who majored in jazz piano performance, and Dylan Guthro, 27, a hip-hop and R&B collaborator, guitarist-cum-producer. At the 2017 Nova Scotia Music Week they walked away with no fewer than five awards, including Recording of the Year for their debut self-titled album *Port Cities*.

"What ties us all together is an appreciation for good songwriting," says Breagh Mackinnon, nominated spokesperson for the band. In fact, it is through a love of songwriting that they all met. In 2011 they attended the Gordie Sampson Song Camp in Nova Scotia. "The band came together very naturally. We developed a system of co-writing and collaborating even before Port Cities became official. We were on a songwriters' circle tour a few years ago. Every night we'd play gigs where we'd each play our own song in a round. At the end of the tour we were singing so much on each others' songs, had so many three-part harmonies entwined into them and so many songs we'd written together that we thought we'd combine forces and make it official. We've been writing songs together for about five years now."

Their debut album came out in Canada last year but was only released this side of the pond in March this year. At times the album has a distinct Nashville sound, but just before you get there it's pulled back to a more popular, contemporary style. They don't quite take it in turns to sing, but the fact that they mix it up keeps the listener and the album invigorated.

"Sometimes its very obvious that it's either a Carleton or Dylan song," Mackinnon says. "But other times we might be writing and Dylan will say, 'Hey, Breagh, you give this a try.' We're all open to trying new things and whatever gets the message of the song across the best."

It's a sound that's carving its own niche, always fresh and underpinned by some almost pristine three-way harmonies.

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The single 'Back to the Bottom' is the first track on the album. It's a powerful opening number about the antagonistic nature of relationships. It starts with an almost whispery voice (Dylan), which is then joined by Breagh before crescendoing to the chorus when Carleton adds extra harmony. "The song was actually a finished piece in Dylan's solo show before we started Port Cities," says Mackinnon. "He started writing it with Gordie Sampson at the camp where we all met, before he brought it to the band. We're very glad we all got to work on it and put the Port Cities spin on it. It turned into a duet between Dylan and I but there are a lot of three-way harmonies. It made us all realise how fun it is to sing together as a group and how we can focus on that vocal blend. It's still one of our favourite songs to play; even after three years we still love it."

The song 'Sound of Your Voice', a classic love song, has undertones of a fledgling Mumford & Sons band, as if the fingerstyle acoustic guitar playing could turn into a banjo at any moment. "This track was started late one night. I think we had the verse first and we weren't sure how to tie together the meaning of the song so we brought it to Gordie. He said, 'The sound of your voice cuts through the noise.' We knew that was the perfect line that tied everything together from the verse. It really drives the point home that love can be really simple, and there's beauty in that simplicity.

'On The Nights You Stay Home', brings to mind a young Don Henley, hats off to Carleton. "The song is an idea that Carleton had. He overheard a friend's mum talking to her son at a Christmas party," Mackinnon says. 'She was trying to convince him to come over. She said, 'Scott, you'll never remember the nights you stay home.' Carleton wrote it down on his phone as a future idea for a song. A few months later he brought it along to one of our collaborators, Donovan Woods, an inspirational Toronto-based songwriter. We finished the song with him – its definitely a favourite of ours."

Port Cities compose their songs in a fluid and flexible way. "Usually one of us will have an idea and bring it to the other members of the band, and we'll all follow that thread and see where it wants to go lyrically or production wise. On this album we've worked with other writers. It changes every time. We love collaborating with writers and other artists."

The album finishes on an ethereal note with Mackinnon's smokey tones wishing you back to when you were a child and the flighty ambitions you might have once had. Accompanied by drone-like guitar parts it makes an atmospheric ending to an album that caters to the many.

Prior to Port Cities each musician led busy independent musical lives. "Port Cities is our main focus now," Mackinnon says. "We haven't had much time to pursue other projects but we all have separate interests: Dylan is getting really good at production – he'll be working with rap and hip-hop artists producing beats and tracks for them; if we have a weekend off I'll do a jazz piano gig; when Carleton has time he'll head down to Nashville and work with country artists. We all have separate interests but the record has kept us busy this last year!"

"We were singing so much on each others' songs, we thought we'd better combine forces"

The producer, Gordie Sampson, lives in Nashville, where most of the album was recorded. 'Gordie knows us really well as individuals. He's done a great job of combining our three musical styles and making that

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combination work. We travel back and forth from Nashville and up to Cape Breton. We rehearse at Carleton's parents house as often as we can, otherwise we rehearse at Dylan's recording studio."

This month they embark on a UK tour. Their live sound is usually more whittled down than the fuller sound on the album. "We try to have more of an intimate sound on stage. Sometimes we get to add bass and drums to get the big band sound, but for this tour it's going to be more stripped down."

Port Cities will tour Germany during June, before returning to Canada. "We're really looking forward to playing the Mariposa Folk Festival in Ontario and we're especially excited for a show in our home city of Halifax next fall with the Nova Scotia Symphony Orchestra!" ■

Port Cities' self-titled album is out now. Info: www.portcities.ca

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YOU ARE WOLF

Award-winning composer Kerry Andrew tells us about upcoming album, Keld

What happens when you fuse traditional folk music with the avante garde stylings of Bjork and Laurie Anderson? You'd better ask award-winning composer Kerry Andrew, who alongside multi-instrumentalist Sam Hall and percussionist Peter Ashwell form trio You Are Wolf. The band make bold arrangements of folk songs and folklore-inspired originals drawing on electronica, new classical music and rock.

Not satisfied with the usual themes common to songwriting, their upcoming album, *Keld*, purports to explore the theme of freshwater, water sprites, vengeful rivers and wild swimming. Intriguing...

How old are you and where are you based?
I'm 39 and I'm based in South London.

How would you describe your style?
Folk with a twist! I deeply love traditional songs and stories, but am always looking to do something different with them. I'm influenced by traditional folk artists, but equally like to draw on modern classical music, alt-pop, different world musics, and electronica. Everything is fair game, but the bare bones of the songs are always at its heart.

How has the sound developed from 2014's *Hawk To The Hunting Gone*?
I've been working for the last couple of years as a trio with Sam Hall and Pete Ashwell, so the emphasis has been taken away from heavy vocal looping and layering to something more expansive. There's still an experimental vocal vibe to some of the songs, but there's loads of 'cello, bass, percussion and other things.

Your aim for the album was to find songs that featured strong female characters...
I'm just aware that it's quite easy to find traditional songs where a woman is left lamenting the death/departure of her love... there are still one or two moments like that on the album, but I made an effort to seek out stories with more emboldened women! Once or twice I altered the gender of a character, just to change it up a bit.

Are you happy with how it turned out?
Very much! It feels like it's progressed from the previous sound. It's taken quite a while to make, from sourcing the songs and first developing them to now. I worked – as I did on the first album – with the producer MaJiKer, best-known for his work with brilliant French alt-pop artist Camille, and he brings an experimental pop sensibility to the sound. I'm looking forward to seeing how it's received.

Your debut novel *Swansong* came out in January too. Tell us a little more about that...
Yes! Music has always come first, but as a composer I mostly work with voices and text, and I've always loved writing. I started trying out fiction in 2013, and got interested

in transposing what I do with You Are Wolf – telling traditional stories in contemporary ways – in a literary form. So Swansong is actually deeply inspired by a folk ballad I sing on *Hawk to the Hunting Gone*, though it brings it into the present day; my protagonist is a spiky, sweary 20 year old student who runs away from a terrible incident in London to stay with her mum in a house-sit in the West Highlands. There she encounters far more spooky and strange things... it's been getting some nice press so far, and I'm excited to see where it all takes me.

What are your music plans for 2018?
As a composer, I'm working on a WW1 requiem for loads of Birmingham kids to sing; a big choral piece for the National Youth Choir; and a music-theatre/storytelling piece with children's writer Laura Dockrill. I'm developing a post-Brexit opera about witches with writer/singer Jessica Walker and releasing a winter album with the a cappella group I sing with, Juice Vocal Ensemble. I'm already thinking about You Are Wolf's third album, and I'm looking forward to collaborating with writer Robert Macfarlane and illustrator Jackie Morris, setting some of the beautiful texts from their nature-celebrating book *The Lost Words*.

What instruments do you play?
I would definitely call myself a singer first! But I also play piano/keyboards, have recently bought a synth, can do pipes and recorders and got my flute out of its case for the first time in about ten years recently; I'll merrily play glockenspiel and melodica too, and have a tenor ukelele that I use in the most minimal of ways! And we should really count my loop station as an instrument – it's a brilliant bit of hardware that I couldn't do without.

How did you first got into composing?
I was always interested in writing little tunes on my recorder, piano and flute, so probably from the age of ten or so. But I really remember writing a blues song about my football team, Wycombe Wanderers, when I was 14 and realising that it was pretty good. I was a late starter – some composers were writing symphonies by then, ha!

Who were your early musical influences?
Depends how early you're talking! When I was a teenager I loved Daisy Age hip hop, alt-pop, Radiohead, Beck, Blur. I discovered Eliza Carthy (via her double album *Red Rice*) when I was about 20, and that was a revelation to me – here was an artist capable of performing folk songs both in a traditional style and with contemporary pop influences. I was all about Bjork and Meredith Monk for a while, and later other artists who draw on many genres and are constantly exploring, such as Laurie Anderson and Damon Albarn.

Who's inspiring you these days?
Many of the above, still! I love Lisa Knapp and

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> “Everything is fair game, but the songs' bare bones are at their heart”

Sam Lee within the folk world. Camille, the French alt-pop singer, brought out a fantastic new album and live show this year. The new You Are Wolf album is inspired by everyone from Shirley Collins to Steve Reich, PJ Harvey to Julia Holter.

How did you get into playing professionally?
I have been singing professionally with Juice Vocal Ensemble since 2003 – we started the group because we loved singing experimental vocal music and found we worked well together. We started commissioning composers to write for us and have been going since. I gained a huge amount of confidence in singing with Juice and started trying out my own solo folk thing in about 2006, simply because I loved the old songs (and storytelling in them) and found they suited my voice. I sang with a jazz group, Metamorphic, for a good few years, and also still play and sing for fun with my mates in a band called DOLLYman.

Tell me about the set-up for the live shows?
I'm on vocals, loop station, synth, and lots of bits and bobs. Sam Hall plays cello, bass guitar and vocals, and Peter Ashwell is on drums, percussion and vocals; both totally brilliant.

Tell us about the songwriting process…
I come much more from a classical composing background, with the songwriting emerging from that slowly. I always wrote poetry and those turned into lyrics. I much prefer writing with other people – we started creating this album on a few days away in West Sussex. I'd sourced the songs and sketched out the bones of original ones, and then the three of us developed them together. I went to China as a British Council/PRSF Musician in Residence in 2016, and collaborated with two rock bands, which felt like throwing me into the deep end! But it was really good for me to try and be more like a conventional songwriter!

What's been your career highlight so far?
I think winning a fourth British Composer Award at the end of 2017 was pretty magical! But actually being a published novelist trumps everything for me right now! I wouldn't have dreamt of that happening five years ago.

Which artist, dead or alive, would you most like to have a jam with?
I think I'd feel a bit terrified to jam with some of my aforementioned idols. I'd be truly happy to sing with some of my folk idols – Sam Lee, Lisa Knapp, or the Furrow Collective. Or Camille!

Which song do you most wish you'd written?
So many! Tom Waits' 'Blue Valentines', 'The Art Teacher' by Rufus Wainwright, and most of the late Beach Boys stuff.

Do you have any tips for readers?
Well, I'm a vocalist who doesn't practice enough, so I probably need to advise myself! I think getting out and doing it, and developing songs in performance can be great; not agonising over every little detail and needing everything to be perfect before gigging it! I've never had any formal training in singing and have totally learnt on the job. I would also say to singers that sadly we have to look after our bodies because they're our instrument; stay healthy and, um, eat lots of garlic. But maybe not before a gig…

Any artists floating your boat right now?
Lisa Knapp and Offa Rex put out two of my favourite albums last year. I've recently discovered the genre-defying Laura Perrudin, am loving Stick in the Wheel's new album, and am a fan of the doom-tuba dronecore sounds of Ore. ■

***Keld* is out on March 23.**
Info: www.youarewolf.bandcamp.com

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VAN WILLIAM

The guitarist tells us about new album Countries

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As folk biographies go, they don't get more picturesque than that of Van William Pierszalowski – a California singer-songwriter who spent his childhood summers on his father's commercial salmon trawler in Alaska and later moved to Norway. Audiences may know him already from previous bands Waters and Port O'Brien, and more currently, 'Revolution', a collaboration with Sweden's First Aid Kit, with whom he's currently touring North America. We spoke to him about his debut full-length solo album, *Countries*, which is out now.

How would you describe your style to people who haven't heard it before?
I usually say something along the lines of indie-folk-rock songs with pop structures, while making a face that says "I am so uncomfortable trying to describe this right now." If a record store had a "recommended if you like" thing, I would hope that it read early 70s Neil Young, Beck's *Sea Change*, with a little Nirvana *Unplugged*.

What can we expect from the new album?
I have never been close to as happy as I am with *Countries*. It was truly a labor of love. I spent years working on the songs. I'm not a very fast writer, so I had to bunker down for long stretches of time at my folks' little cabin in the Sequoia National Forest to hone in on all the little details. In terms of what you can expect, I'd say tightly arranged, mostly acoustic-driven folk rock songs with pop sensibilities drenched in sweat and weed. And strings.

How did the First Aid Kit single come about?
I first met Klara and Johanna from First Aid Kit years ago. Their first tour ever was opening up for my old band Port O'Brien throughout Europe in the late 2000s. We fell out of touch for many years, and then rediscovered each other at a mutual friend's house party in LA a couple years ago. I sent them the record I had been working on, and they expressed interest in singing on 'Revolution' and making it a proper collaboration, which we did in a matter of days. I had to pinch myself I was so excited about how it was all sounding.

What are your tour plans for 2018?
After this First Aid Kit North America run, I'm joining the entire European leg of the tour as well. We are looking at some festival opportunities this summer, and then will hit the road again later in the fall.

Do you like touring?
Let's get the bad stuff out of the way. For one, the drives can be insanity-inducing. By far the hardest part is being away from my partner and my dog. But when I was making the record, I had no idea I would get to tour at all, so I'm definitely not taking that for granted.

How did you first get into playing the guitar?
I got my first guitar when I was in 4th grade. I was obsessed with Green Day's record *Dookie*, and I wanted to learn how to play exactly like Billy Joe. My parents didn't want me to start on electric guitar, so they got me this small nylon stringed acoustic. I still own it. At first, I was jealous of my friend's guitar, because it was proper-sized and had a rad old McGovern sticker on it, but I grew to fall in love with that first guitar. Throughout high school, I would play it every chance I could get. Currently, it's acting as my beach guitar.

Who were your early musical influences?
Before I discovered Green Day, which led me to the Ramones, Subhumans, and other punk bands, I was into the Beach Boys and The Beatles. Those were the first melodies bouncing around my head, and I'm so grateful for that. In high school, I grew to re-appreciate The Beatles and the first two John Lennon solo records. I also got into indie rock, particularly early Modest Mouse, Built To Spill, Pavement, Belle & Sebastian. Nirvana is my favorite band of all-time. And Neil Young. Did I mention Neil Young yet? I still listen to a lot of the same stuff, and my friends' music. There's something so interesting to me about hearing what your homies are up to. In that category, I've been spinning Fruit Bats, Jim James, Dawes, Springtime Carnviore, Kevin Morby, and First Aid Kit. I've also been obsessed with this other Swedish band The Radio Dept. for the last few years.

How did you get into playing professionally…
My first serious band Port O'Brien caught a few lucky breaks while I was in college at Berkeley. By some stretch of luck, one of my favorite songwriters M Ward happened to be at a show of ours in San Francisco and loved it. He gave an interview with Pitchfork, which mentioned us a few times, and sent the tunes to Conor Oberst, and before you knew it, we were on tour with Bright Eyes and had a management team, booking agent, lawyer, and label interest. It was the most exciting time in my life. I still have the same incredible manager.

Tell me about your setup for the live shows?
On the First Aid Kit tour, we're a three piece. Kera plays bass and sings. and Brian Andrew Marquez plays drums. For local shows and TV appearances, Greta Morgan from Springtime Carnivore plays keys and sings.

What gear are you using for the live shows?
For my acoustic, I had been using a Fender CD-320AS Dreadnought, which I loved, until I tripped over a cable and busted it. I bought this old beat-up Rogue acoustic in Seattle at American Music, and it's a dream! It's basically a beater, but gets the job done very well. On electric, my main guitar is a custom built by Reuben Cox at Old Style Guitars in LA. It's so gorgeous and plays incredibly well. It was actually stolen from our trailer after a tour in San Francisco, only to be found by Reuben (who made the freaking guitar!) at a swap meet in Pasadena over a year later. We've been doing a cover of Neil Young's Cinnamon Girl, and for that I use my Fender Telecaster AA with his standard double drop-D tuning. I use a Fender Deluxe Reverb amp for both acoustic and electric. I blend the DI and amp for the acoustic, using an old Boss Blues Driver on it. For my electric, I have a very simple pedal set-up, with the Fulltone Full-Drive 2 Mosfet always on, using the boost on it with the Blues Driver for lead stuff. I also have a Holy Grail in there for some extra reverb-y moments (I have the reverb on the amp always on 2 or 2.5).

Any notable acoustic guitars in your personal collection (again, detail welcomed)?
My main baby is a 1987 Guild D-25. I bought it from Old Style a few years ago, and I wrote and recorded most of "Countries" with that beauty.

Tell me about your songwriting process.
It almost always starts on acoustic guitar. I usually have little bursts of creativity that result in some vague idea of a riff or chord structure or melody. Then, I start building a track in Logic, beginning with the drum idea. I have a pretty deep collection of drum samples, so if I start there it starts to take shape pretty quickly after that. I usually build out the structure before I tackle the lyrics, which are the hardest part for me. I also have a small circle of friends in LA that I feel comfortable working with.

What has been your career highlight so far?
The release of this record "Countries" was the proudest moment of my career. I've just never had a record that I still love this much after it's been released. In terms of other highlights, smoking a joint with Neil Young and then learning he loved my band was a pretty tough one to beat. Playing on Conan and meeting Ringo Starr is also definitely up there.

Do you have any tips for readers?
If I could do it all over again, I would have kept taking lessons. I plateaued for a long time in my playing abilities. Lessons give you, more little tricks to put in your bag. ■

***Countries* is out now.**
Info: www.vanwilliammusic.com

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NICK DRAKE
KEEPING MEMORIES ALIVE

Nick Drake may have left us at far too young an age but – ahead of a series of 70th birthday memorial concerts led by John Parish – it's clear that his musical career is alive and well today. Ollie McGhie spoke to the organisers about their own relationships with the icon's music

"When I started managing Nick in 1999 I was already managing other living musicians," says Callie Calloman, manager of Nick Drake's estate. "Nick cannot do poor interviews or become a judge on *The Voice* to blow the fans idea of who he is. Many living musicians could adopt this to their benefit, I think."

This year marks the 70th Anniversary of Nick Drake's birth. He lived only a brief 27 years before his death on November 25, 1974. "Gabrielle Drake liked the idea of her unknown dead brother being managed as if he was alive," says Calloman. "This I did, and still do. He still gets offers to appear at various festivals. Strangely, fairly paltry offers too!"

Nick Drake has a posthumous musical legacy, which transcends musical boundaries. This year is bound to bring about a resurgence in Nick Drake remembrance concerts, which is exactly what they are doing at St. Georges Bristol. Two nights in April this year have been given over to Nick Drake' music. The first, entitled 'Remembered For A While' is organised by John Parish (pictured right) and includes London-based vocalist Nadine Khouri and guitarist Jeremy Hogg, among other musicians. Other featured singers are yet to be announced.

Speaking with John Parish, it becomes very clear how loved and respected Nick Drake's music is to him. "The third album 'Pink Moon' is for me one of the best examples of how a record can be stripped to the bone musically, but still feel incredibly rich," says Parish. "As a producer known for often using a pretty open and exposed sound, I often keep *Pink Moon* in mind. Not to attempt to make something sound similar, but to make sure that much is being said by few (musical) words."

'I don't normally do a show of somebody else's music, but I was very happy to contribute. It's a tricky event to put together, without it being a bunch of different people doing covers. You need somebody to be not just an arbiter of taste, but to give it an identity.

"The nice thing about this concert was that everybody who I mentioned it to said they were fans and would love to help. He's very, very well loved. My main hurdle was trying to make it happen within the infrastructure available. How do I give the concert a unifying atmosphere and sound? For me that was narrowing the amount of people involved

> **"There've been many approximations of Nick"**

rather than broadening. I didn't want 10 singers each doing one song. I wanted two or three singers doing five songs each, so it feels very contained.

'The Lochrian String quartet is also involved. Rather than asking them to play the string arrangements I wanted to get some new arrangements written. Rob Ellis [producer, instrumentalist and composer], who's a huge fan of Nick's music, is a great arranger and I got him involved to write – he can be very creative. There's a recording of Nick speaking that isn't on any of the albums, and I'm hoping that Rob can work with it to create something exciting.'

Ellis describes the recording: "It was just a metronome with [Nick Drake] speaking over it. It's on the family tree album that was released a few years back, and I had an idea to 'accompany' him speaking with a string group, but I've not started on that one yet so I might yet abandon the idea if it turns out to be a fool's errand. So much of his even unintentional output is so fragile you barely want to touch it."

Callowman agrees: "There have been many copy-cat approximations of Nick on tour, most of them as dreadful as any poor tribute act may be. There have been very few musicians willing to submit to Nick's songs and thereby invest them with some new spirit. Lisa Hannigan, Sophie Rahman, Brad Mehldau are notable exceptions to this and so, I hope, will John. John is a great interpreter of song. Nick's songs are difficult to copy verbatim, some do this almost as a sport."

"I want all the singers to be women," Parish continues, "So there's less of a temptation to sing in Nick's inimitable style. For me that feels more natural as I tend to work with more women singers than men. It's good to feel like you're in a new place.'

The second night of the mini Nick Drake season is 'Nick Smart's Black-Eyed Dog - Remembering Nick Drake', featuring trumpeter and arranger Nick Smart leading an ensemble of jazz stars including pianist Kit Downes and guitarist John Parricelli, plus vocalists Emily Wright and Alex Taylor. Nick Drake's music is well-documented as crossing the boundary into jazz. He does this with such ease you'd think he'd written the songs with that purpose in mind.

"Nick's songs are easy to take elsewhere, as soon as they cross genres or sex, they seem to take on a new life of their own – the song's own. They leave Nick behind.' Calloman

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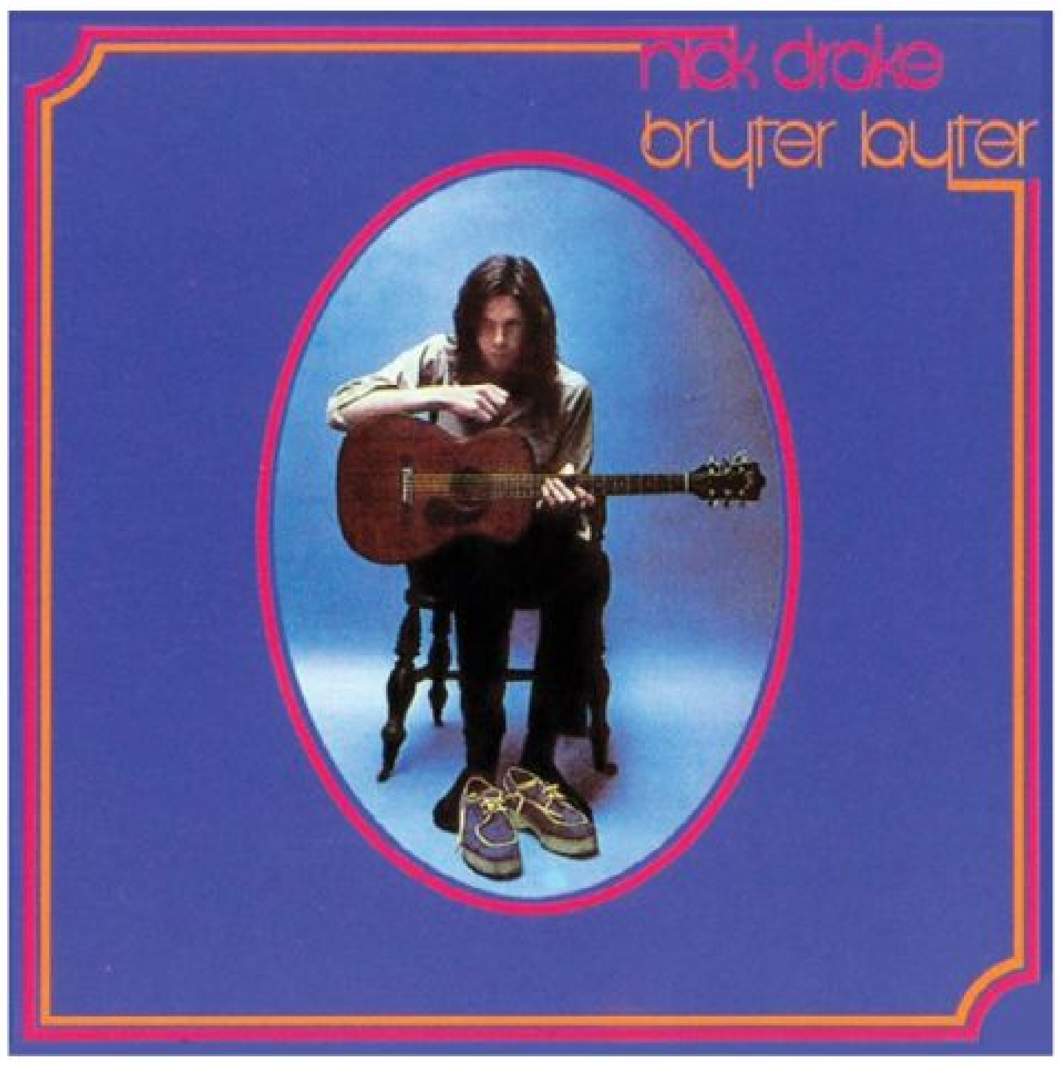

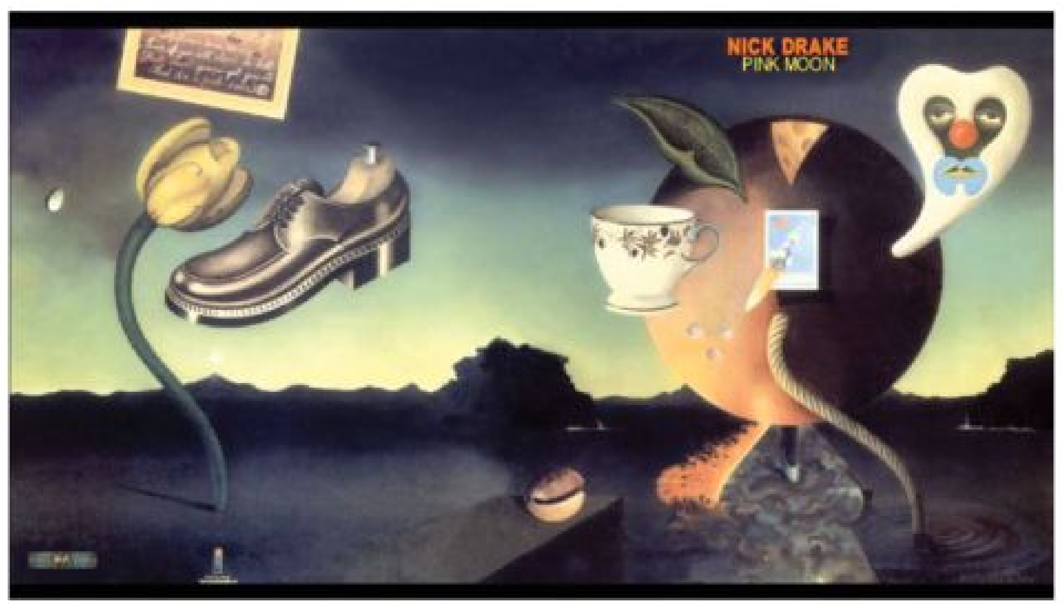

says. 'One of the finest cover versions for me is, ironically, the song 'They're Leaving Me Behind' by Grazyna Auguscik [contemporary jazz vocalist].'

Nick Smart explains what might make this transition into jazz so smooth. "There is, without question, something timeless and genre-less about pure quality. And they are particularly definable qualities: beautifully crafted melodies that have intervalic shape, plus chord progressions and song forms that are interesting to improvisers to play over. Not that the harmonies are coming from jazz as such, but they have strong functional movements and a certain stripped-down logic, almost modal, that mean you can inject some of your own extra colours (substitutions etc) and it doesn't detract from the original flow of the music. It's like a strong musical skeleton; you can put a different body and clothing on it and it still somehow stands up and retains its essence."

It is hard to pin down what exactly it is that creates this essence. To some it is the timeless quality. If every new generation is able to rediscover him as a new artist and hold him up as a mirror to contemporary cultural values then this must surely be the case. "The songs' sometimes rather wispy indefiniteness – a reflection of Drake's very English reticence? – perhaps enables the listener to colour them with their own emotions, provoking an intensely personal response," says Phil Jonson, senior programme producer at St Georges Bristol.

It is not the just the listener Nick Drake inspires. Singer-songwriter Nadine Khouri says, "Nick Drake inspires others to be bold and uncompromising in their artistic choices to create something both intensely personal and timeless. His guitar playing is innovative and masterful but I think his singing influenced a whole score of songwriters too. It is deceptively minimal as the phrasing is quite complex if you listen closely."

The John Parish and Nick Smart concerts continue to show how Nick Drake is remembered and reinterpreted for modern times, but just how important is this?

"It is more than important, it is essential and also inevitable," says Calloman. "If I go to listen to a recital of Thomas Tallis I don't expect the great man to appear on stage. Nick is dead. No-one expects to see Nick playing live anymore, but to not hear his music performed live on stage would be a loss to us all." ■

'Remembered For A While – The Music of Nick Drake' will be held at St George's, Bristol on Thursday 12 April 2018
Info: http://bit.ly/2EIqQct

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THE DIY ATTITUDE

When life gives you lemons… Faced with unemployment, Kip Winter and Dave Wilson – aka folk act Winter Wilson – used existing careers skills to forge the touring success they'd long wished for

Eight years ago, we were both in full-time work, while also playing a few gigs on the UK folk circuit. But in 2012 it all changed. We'd known Dave's job was at risk for some time – he worked in social services and the financial crash made it inevitable (see 'Consultation Bull**** Blues' on our album *Cutting Free* for our feelings on the matter). He was planning to find a part-time job, when Kip's job went at almost exactly the same time, which was something of a shock. Up until then we'd been very lucky – we'd both had really good jobs and made good money.

We took a look at our finances, and decided that if we made some cutbacks we had enough money to get by for a year with the gigs we already had booked. That gave us the space to try and build up the music. We thought of it as a gap year – we both fully expected to get at least part-time jobs at the end of it. We used my redundancy money to buy Tallullah (our campervan) and hit the road. Wherever we had a gig we would leave home a couple of days early and play floor spots in folk clubs on the way there and back. We'd sleep in lay byes, car parks, you name it.

GETTING HEARD IN THE UK

We almost always got booked. People often ask us how we started to get bookings further afield, and our reply is that there is no substitute for being seen. Promoters need to know what you can actually do live. In the past, we used to send out CDs recorded straight from the desk at gigs. Now we send links to live videos online. We want to show not only that we can do the musical performance, but also how we work with an audience.

In the run up to losing our jobs, Dave had been writing the songs for a new album; this became the redundancy-inspired *Cutting Free*, released in late 2013. The album was very well received, and was listed in the *Daily Telegraph*'s Top 10 Folk Albums For Summer 2014 list. We were ecstatic. We didn't suddenly sell loads more CDs, but suddenly people had heard of us; when we phoned promoters, we no longer heard "Who?" If you say "Book us; we're brilliant", you sound like a fool.

We've learned to use what other people have said (CD reviews, live reviews etc) to sell ourselves. I've been humbled by the compliments our songwriting has received, but what isn't surprising is the reaction to Kip's voice. It really is one in a million, not just for its power but also its emotional quality. When she sings a song she'll have you believing every word.

From the start, we've done everything ourselves. As a result, we've built up something of a cottage (or campervan!) industry. We are still our own agent (mainly Dave), we have a recording setup at home, Kit does graphics and press (she used to work in marketing), plus logistics. Wifi has made this so much easier. We often find ourselves sat in a motorway service station chasing gigs, updating accounts, interacting on social media – you name it.

> **"It's a cottage (or campervan!) industry"**

And then of course, there's the songwriting. Dave's been writing songs since his teens, but I feel like he's influenced by a much wider range of music these days. We never know what's coming next, from the very traditional English sounding, through Americana, blues, country. Dave plays guitar, of course, but also banjo and mandolin, and I play flute, piano accordion and occasional guitar. This variety also carries through into the venues and audiences we play to. We like it when somebody comes up to us at the end of a gig and says "I can't stand folk music, but I like what you do."

GOING FURTHER AFIELD

As we became better known the work kept coming in, but you can only do so many gigs a year in the UK without becoming overexposed. So we looked abroad, firstly to Germany and the Netherlands, and then to Australia and New Zealand. This is where YouTube really came into its own; there are loads of live videos of us on there, and we simply could not have set up these tours without them. For example, Dave tried to get a couple of Australian agents interested, but they'd never heard of us (why would they?), so he simply emailed every venue he could find with Youtube links – and we had a tour.

The last few years have really been all about reaching a wider audience. Knowing that Fairport Convention always take a special guest on their winter tour – so we sent Dave Pegg a copy of *Cutting Free* and within weeks we'd been invited to appear on the 2018 tour. Cue much merriment! Things like this just don't happen to old gits like us: we knew we had to grab it with both hands.

We spent the summer of 2017 writing and recording the new album *Far Off on the Horizon* for release to coincide with the tour. We're now gearing up for the Fairport tour and our own tour after that. Talullah's been serviced, we've changed our strings and bought new shoes. We're on the road solidly from late January until the end of June. So the gap year's going pretty well so far. We've abandoned all thoughts of "proper" jobs. We don't earn anything like as much as we used to, but who cares about being skint when you're having this much fun?" ■

Info: www.winterwilson.com

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FINDLAY BROWN

Acoustic catch up with Danish singer-songwriter Findlay Brown ahead of new album Not Everything Beautiful Is Good

Yorkshire-born, Denmark-dwelling Findlay Brown has been putting records out since 2007. Since the release of his debut long player that year, *Separated By the Sea*, through to this year's *Not Everything Beautiful Is Good*, Brown has gained fans in high places, with support from Suede's Bernard Butler and tours with the great and good of guitar (Bert Jansch, John Renbourn) and pop (Taylor Swift, Lilly Allen and more).

How would you describe your style?
Melodic, intimate, acoustic, folk, classic songs, the music can sometimes feel cinematic. I like to use imagery, and metaphors inspired by love, nature the cosmos and beyond.

You've lived in New York, London and have recently moved to rural Denmark. Has the move affected your sound?
My wife is from Denmark and we had a son so we moved back to be closer to family. I grew up in the countryside and feel that has been a big influence on my music. We live near a forest a short distance from the beach and it's been great for me to reconnect with that simple feeling for writing songs and thinking about sounds.

The new album *Not Everything Beautiful Is Good* is coming out in May. What can we expect from it and are you happy with the end result?
I made the album with Tor Bach Kristensen who recorded and mixed it in a studio in Copenhagen and Bo Rande who helped with arrangements, playing keyboards and horns. We wanted it to be quite minimal, really focussing on the intimacy of my voice and acoustic guitar at the centre and then adding subtle production to create different moods and atmosphere. There is some fantastic bass playing by Elijah Thompson who plays for Father John Misty and drums by Fridolin Nordsø and Morten Lund who are both amazing Danish musicians. Also David Rossi, who is a great string arranger, worked on a couple of tracks. I think the album has a meditative feel to it and a longing, I hope it's evocative for the listener and an escape. I think it's my most honest work and I'm very proud of what we have created.

What are your tour plans for 2018?
I'm booking shows at the moment and hope to be playing a lot this year! Also looking for a new booking agent if anyone is interested!

What are the best – and worst – things about being on the road?
Worst would be missing my wife and son. Lack of sleep as well, I love my sleep! Although having a young one, you get used to a bit of sleep deprivation. And crap food. Best thing about being on the road is finding yourself in all these strange places that you would have never visited otherwise and all the different characters you meet along the way. The closeness you build up with the people you tour with is very special too, like army buddies, sharing your songs wherever you go.

How did you first get into playing the guitar? Do you remember your first?
My sister got a cheap nylon string guitar for her birthday – I think she was about 18 and I would have been 16 – and I kind of adopted it, as she didn't take much interest in it. She still has it actually and when I visit I often write songs on it. It has some strange magic about it. But the first guitar I bought was the Epiphone Sheraton (sunburst) because it looked like the guitar John Lennon used. I was given a copy of The Beatles' autographs by my grandfather, which I sold to buy the guitar.

Who were your early musical influences?
The Beatles, Jimi Hendrix, Traffic, The Small Faces, Family and Love.

Who is inspiring you these days?
Most recently I'm really into Jan Hammer Group, Lal & Mike Waterson's *Bright Phoebus* album, John Martyn's *Glorious Fool*. There's guy who goes under the name Mind Over Mirrors, Yusef Lateef, and I've been listening to quite a bit of West Coast / Yacht Rock kind of stuff like Ned Doheny.

Do you play any other instruments?
A bit of piano and bass.

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"I let the tune go where it wants to go and try and get out of the way"

How did you get into playing music professionally?
I was in a couple of bands before I went solo and it's been a constant chipping away at the music and trying to make a career. My first real break was when I got offered a deal with Sony BMG for my publishing and a recording contract with Peacefrog for my first album *Separated By The Sea* around 2007. That was when I started making a living from music.

What guitars and gear are you using for the live shows?
My main guitar that I use for both recording and touring is a Santa Cruz Dreadnought. I was collecting an old Guild that was having a pickup fitted at the shop before a tour and grabbed the Santa Cruz to play while I waited and ended up taking it home and leaving the Guild behind.

Any notable acoustic guitars in your personal collection?
Apart from my Santa Cruz I have a mahogany Martin D15 and also a few classical guitars.

Tell me about your songwriting process?
Songs generally come the same way for me, I sit with the guitar and find a couple of chords that I like and if a good melody comes I then let the tune go where it wants to go and I try and get out of the way. Sometimes the words come with the melody and I have to make sense of them in some way and then I'll swap things around and edit a bit so the song feels like it unfolds in a good way. Other times I have to work very hard on the lyrics, re-writing a line over and over again. Often the best lines come when I'm out walking, just running the tune over and over in my head. It might be just one word I need and it feels like a conveyer belt going by with every possible choice until the right one just pops in.

What has been the highlight of your career so far?
There has been so many but probably the one that stands out is playing on *The Late Show with David Letterman*. It's where they used to film the Ed Sullivan show and I'm a huge Beatles fan and of 60s music in general so that was pretty special!

If you could jam with any artist, dead or alive, who would you choose?
Paul McCartney.

What song do you most wish you'd written?
That's a tough one but right now I'd say 'Who Knows Where The Time Goes' by Fairport Convention, it's such a wonderful song.

Which gig or festival would you most like to play, or have played?
The Band's Last Waltz show would have been pretty awesome to be a part of!

How do you like to relax?
I love to be out in nature making fires, eating BBQ and having a couple of beers watching the stars.

We're always keen to get some player tips for readers. Do you have any pearls of wisdom to share?
I always find learning other people's guitar techniques that seem a little bit out of reach can really help develop your playing. For me it was some of the fingerpicking styles that people like Jackson C Frank were playing that gave me a brake through and helped me find something I felt really suited my songs. ■

***Not Everything Beautiful Is Good* is out now.**
Info: www.facebook.com/FindlayBrown

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Levellers at Metway Studio: (Clockwise from front) Mark Chadwick, Matt Savage, Charlie Heather, Jon Sevink, Jeremy Cunningham, Simon Friend

30 YEARS OF LEVELLERS

Hated by the music press. Spied-on by the police. Battling addiction and an unfashionable image, it's a wonder Levellers ever went on to become the leaders of a counterculture phenomenon. But 30 years since their formation, Levellers are back with an all-acoustic new album and they're loving music more than ever

WORDS: DAN HOBSON **PHOTOS:** JORDAN HARRIS

"I didn't think I'd be alive in 2018," says Levellers frontman Mark Chadwick on whether he expected the band to still be going after 30 years. "At 21, I thought we'd be lucky to get five years out of it. The fact that I'm nearly 52 and still doing this is a bit of a shocker. But there you go, time passes so quickly."

The years may have flown by, but Chadwick is definitely still alive and Levellers are going strong. In fact, Chadwick says the band – Jeremy Cunningham (bass guitar), Charlie Heather (drums), Jon Sevink (fiddle), Simon Friend (guitar and lots more) and Matt Savage (keyboards) – enjoys performing live more than ever these days.

To mark the Brighton folk-punk outfit's 30th anniversary, they have just released new record *We The Collective*. The all-acoustic album comprises mostly reimagined and reworked classics, plus a couple of new tracks. With the inclusion of a string section, it's certainly Levellers like you've never heard them before – but the guys have definitely pulled it off.

"We're really happy with the end result," says Chadwick of the album. "When you do something which is, essentially, such a left-hand turn for us, we wanted it to be really, really good.

"Rather than it just being tired acoustic versions of material that we've done before, though, the track listing is not obvious. We've chosen songs that sound better or different with this approach. It draws attention to the lyrics and the nature of the songs in as much as they can be played in any way; by a campfire, by a quartet, or in a rock 'n' roll band."

The band enlisted legendary producer John Leckie (Radiohead, Stone Roses) to help develop new acoustic arrangements for eight of their previous singles including 'Liberty', 'Hope Street' and 'One Way' which they recorded straight to tape at the world-famous Abbey Road Studios. They also recorded two brand new songs for the record.

The first new tune, 'The Shame', deals with the plight of refugees. The hard-hitting song and video certainly don't shy away from the disturbing truth either. "We decided to tackle the subject exactly because it is a thorny issue; it's horrible, nobody really wants to stare at it," Chadwick explains. "Levellers have always made people look at things they don't particularly wanna look at, you know? We usually do it in a much more joyous way, but in this particular instance, there's no joy there. It's like, 'This is hard-hitting, this is unpleasant', but it's a statement and there's nothing about it which isn't true. It would bring a tear to a glass eye."

> **"At 21, I thought we'd be lucky to get five years out of it"**

The other new one is a tune called 'Drug Bust McGee', dealing with the issue of undercover police officers. The tune takes inspiration from the Levellers past when the police were so suspicious of the crusty counterculture leaders from Brighton, they went undercover and penetrated their community.

"'Drug Bust McGee' is based on personal experience and the experiences of others that we know," says Chadwick. "There was a period in time in the Levellers' life when it was deemed by the powers-that-be that they needed to infiltrate our organisation and other organisations in the Brighton area to find out what we were up to and whether we were a true threat to the state or not.

"And they did it! They sent undercover policeman who became our friends. Then suddenly, these 'friends' would disappear and we all know why. Some of us had our suspicions, some didn't. They're in your life for a couple of years and then they're gone. In some people's lives, they had relationships and babies – then fucked off. It a crazy abomination which happened and has been highlighted in that song. It was deeply criminal behaviour, on their part. They were doing it all over the country too."

It's easy to forget how influential Levellers were in the 90s; revolutionaries on a quest to change the world through the power of music. Never quite in fashion, the band carved a niche out of the fact that they didn't really fit in anywhere; music for the disenfranchised by the disenfranchised. Travellers, punks, hippies, students, indie kids, all united by disillusionment with the State and the way things were going. Levellers spoke the truth and it caught on fast.

"Generally it was a very positive time," says Chadwick. "A lot of cohesion between various

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"We needed a lead so we got a violin. We didn't want electric guitar – solos were out then"

different, what are now fairly disparate, parts of society. Different groups very much in cahoots with one another to do better things. And having a great time doing it! We had very idealistic dreams, you know? Not being pious, or strict, doing things collectively. It was great. That vibe; thinking we could change things and, actually, changing things on a micro level. We were doing things and trying to make a positive difference."

In 1988, Chadwick met Cunningham in Brighton pub, The Eagle. Despite getting off to a bumpy start – Cunningham was hitting on Chadwick's girlfriend – the pair soon bonded over shared views on left-wing politics and a passion for drinking. As it transpired, both were in bands and were equally unhappy at those bands' failure to sing about anything important. Chadwick told Cunningham that he'd written some songs along the lines of their discussion and ended up going round to his house and playing them. His new pal was blown away. A new band was about to be formed. Chadwick and Cunningham recruited Charlie Heather on drums and Jon Sevink – who was the brother of Mark's girlfriend – on fiddle. With that line-up, the Levellers' infectious folk-punk style was born.

"We never aimed for a particular style, though, it just so happened to turn out that way," Chadwick remembers. "I came to it from a Roy Harper, Cat Stevens, Simon & Garfunkel, John Lennon style of singular songwriting and we thought we needed a lead instrument so we got Jon in on violin. We didn't wanna get an electric guitar player because guitar solos were out then. But having a fiddle in the sound makes it folkier, so our style kind of developed out of the songs and instrumentation; we didn't design it, the music designed itself."

Despite accepting the Roots Award by the BBC Radio 2 Folk Awards in 2011, rumour has it that Levellers took offence to being dubbed a folk band back in the day.

"We didn't care," Chadwick laughs, setting the record straight. "Myself, Jeremy and Jon; we were always into folk music. But it wasn't like the noughties when it was cool. If you said you liked that music in 1988 it meant you were weird, which we were. We were quite happy to go to folk clubs, but we'd get kicked out of them because we didn't fit into folk clubs either. We were suspended somewhere between folk and rock."

Their first two demo tapes were sold at gigs throughout 1988-89 and the band's reputation quickly grew, along with its expanding army of dedicated followers. They signed to their future manager Phil Nelson's small label Hag Records to release the *Carry Me* EP.

Alan Miles later joined the band to play harmonica, guitar and the mandolin and they recorded their debut full length album *A Weapon Called The Word*, which was released

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Player Tip

Detune your guitar – don't just rely on the standard tunings. Mess around with your tunings. Especially for writing, suddenly a whole new world will open up to you. One of my favourites is tuning a guitar as low as it will go as low before the strings slide off the neck. It's B, F#, B, F#, B, E – it's mental.

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via the French label Musidisc. The debut is one of the few albums known to have gone gold without ever even charting.

When Alan Miles quit the band after the first album, it was to be a blessing in disguise. His departure meant that talented singer-songwriter and multi-instrumentalist Simon Friend, a roadie for New Model Army and a musician well known on the same circuit, could replace him (Friend reportedly even turned down the offer of becoming NMA's guitarist in favour of joining the Levellers). The line-up has stayed together ever since, with Matt Savage later joining on keyboards. As well as a line-up change, the early 90s also saw the group part with Musidisc after Derek Green (the man responsible for signing the Sex Pistols) discovered them and signed the band to independent label China Records

With new life injected into the group, they set about recording their seminal album, *Levelling The Land*. Released in 1991, the album boasted an accomplished set of politically charged folk-rock classics. Despite not making the Top 40, single 'One Way' became an instant live favourite; an ultimate statement of freedom which was quickly adopted as an anthem among followers.

While the fans loved the album, the press was not onboard – and their contempt annoyed the band. While the odd bad review is fair game, the band did not feel that their image fitted the perceived notion of cool at the time. They also suspected the reason that the press resented Levellers was because they had played no part in creating them – the rise of Levellers was organic and self-made. When one NME critic gave *Levelling The Land* a kicking, Cunningham allegedly responded by sending some shit in a shoe box.

When Levellers set about recording their third album, it was amid a dark period in their history. Feeling overworked from excessive touring and suffering from writer's block, the third record was always going to be a slog.

Cunningham was also falling deeper and deeper into heroin addiction. Believing the travelling lifestyle he was part of was becoming less and less of a freedom, he began taking the drug as a means of escape – but soon became dependent on it.

The five friends were beginning to drift apart and creativity was running low. The result was the inconsistent but powerfully dark self-titled album, which reflected the gloomy atmosphere that surrounded them.

The album continued the band's ascent, however, shooting to No. 2 in the UK charts upon its release in 1993, with all three singles from it reaching the Top 20.

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"Musicians deserve a roof over their heads like anybody else"

The following year would see Levellers reach the height of their popularity. Despite the press struggling to say anything positive, they became too big to ignore. So, instead of ignoring them, the press simply made the case that Levellers did not deserve to be so popular. It all backfired quite spectacularly.

This was *the* time for Levellers – they were the most popular band in Britain. Levellers went on to score more gold, silver and platinum discs than any other UK act in the 90s, notching up seven Top 40 albums and 14 Top 40 singles.

Their 1994 performance at Glastonbury drew the biggest crowd the festival had ever seen; more than 300,000 fans ignoring every word of the music press. Beautiful.

It was in 1994 that the band purchased a derelict factory in Brighton, named the Metway after the original owners, and created a self-contained headquarters, which they still have today. The buildings house their offices, fan club, rehearsal area, a bar and a recording studio. 'Hope Street' the lead single from *Zeitgeist* (1995), was the first recording to come

out of Metway. When the album was released in September that year it charted at No. 2 in the week of its release. Owing to the success, manager Phil Nelson persuaded China Records to advertise the album on television and it reached No. 1 in its second week on the chart.

The third single from the album, 'Just the One', gave them their first Top of the Pops appearance, playing the tongue-in-cheek drinking anthem dressed in tuxedos. 'Just the One' was specially re-recorded for the single release, with The Clash's frontman and long-time Levellers hero, Joe Strummer, guesting on honky-tonk piano. It reached No. 12 in the UK.

"There has been plenty of good times," Chadwick says with a chuckle. "Picking a highlight is difficult. It ranges from the first time we sold out our local venue, The Richmond, in Brighton, two nights in a row on our seventh or eighth outing, to headlining Glastonbury three or four years after that, to hosting our own festival, Beautiful Days, in 2003.

"The best times are always around when there's a genuine surge in people noticing what you're doing; when people are talking about you and saying, 'Actually this band are relevant and doing something cool.'"

Would Levellers succeed in today's musical landscape? "I would say it would be virtually impossible. I hate that because musicians deserve to eat and have a roof over their heads as much as anybody else does. If they're not making pop music, they're gonna struggle. But there are ways and means of making a living. You're never going to be rich, though."

"There's more good music now, than there has ever been"

"I think the music industry had changed beyond all recognition," Chadwick adds. "It's so polarised now; it's either pop, legends like U2, then there's everybody else; which is a really broad brush stroke. In a way, I love that because I can listen to music that nobody else is listening to. There's more good music now than there has ever been. But the accessibility, that's what's changed; the way music is sold, or, more to the point, not sold. Music's better, but the medium and how it's sold has gone."

Chadwick's journey to becoming the leader of a musical movement started on "some rainy fucking Tuesday" in the late 70s when he decided to bunk off school. At the time he was living in Germany due to his dad being in the army. "I bunked off, and on German telly they were showing the whole of *Woodstock* in the daytime; a three or four-hour movie. I watched the whole of that and thought, 'That's what I wanna do'.

"My dad came back and I said, 'Dad can you get me a guitar?'. My dad was in the military band and they had guitars and the works, so he brought me back a guitar that night. After dancing around in front of the mirror for a couple of years, I thought, 'I'd better learn how to play this'."

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While many cut their teeth on some ramshackle Spanish guitar or a naff Strat copy, Chadwick fared extremely well with his first guitar. "It was a really rare German copy of a Gibson Les Paul Standard with loads of moving parts. It was a beautiful thing. It'd probably be worth a fortune if I still had it. I bought a Fender acoustic when I was about 16, a proper Fender D-20 acoustic. That was my guitar forever, for years and years, until it literally couldn't function anymore."

These days, Chadwick's favourite is a Martin D-20, which he uses for writing and performing. There's a rare beast in his personal collection, though. "I've got Ralph McTell's old acoustic, a Martin D-20," says Chadwick. "It's beaten up as fuck; it's been around the houses."

When it comes to writing the tunes, Chadwick says there are four approaches that Levellers adopt. "Either I write a song completely, the chords, melody and lyrics, or Simon will do exactly the same thing. Or, we'll use some lyrics from Jeremy and either Simon or I will put the music and melody to it. And occasionally, they come out of nowhere between all of us. The majority come from either Simon or me writing on our own, with an acoustic guitar, in the bedroom. That's the best kind of way to write a song.

"We've tried many different ways over the years, but it always ends up being a very collaborative thing in the end. If it doesn't work as a collaborative experience, no matter how good the song is, we generally tend not to do it. If I can't explain a song to the band, who else am I gonna be able to explain it to? If they can't get it, nobody else will."

"I enjoy performing more now than ever before"

There are many remarkable things about the Levellers. Their tunes, for one. But, when you meet them (as we were lucky enough to at Metway Studio), it's amazing just how down to earth they all are, despite more than 30 years living the life. However, possibly the most remarkable thing is just how passionate they are about music.

Every year since 2003 they sell all 17,500 tickets to their own festival – the proudly sponsorship-free and affordable Beautiful Days, in Devon – and the band love playing music more now than they ever have.

"I probably enjoy playing and performing more now than ever before, to be honest," says Chadwick. "There was a point in our career where the gigs got in the way of our lifestyle. But now gigs are our lifestyle. Our level of musicianship is better than it's ever been. We live to be onstage. That's never changed, though; we've always wanted to entertain people and really change the atmosphere of the day by playing a really blinding set. That's what we do. And the only you get the more fun that becomes." ■

We The Collective **is out now.**
Info: www.levellers.co.uk
Levellers festival: www.beautifuldays.org

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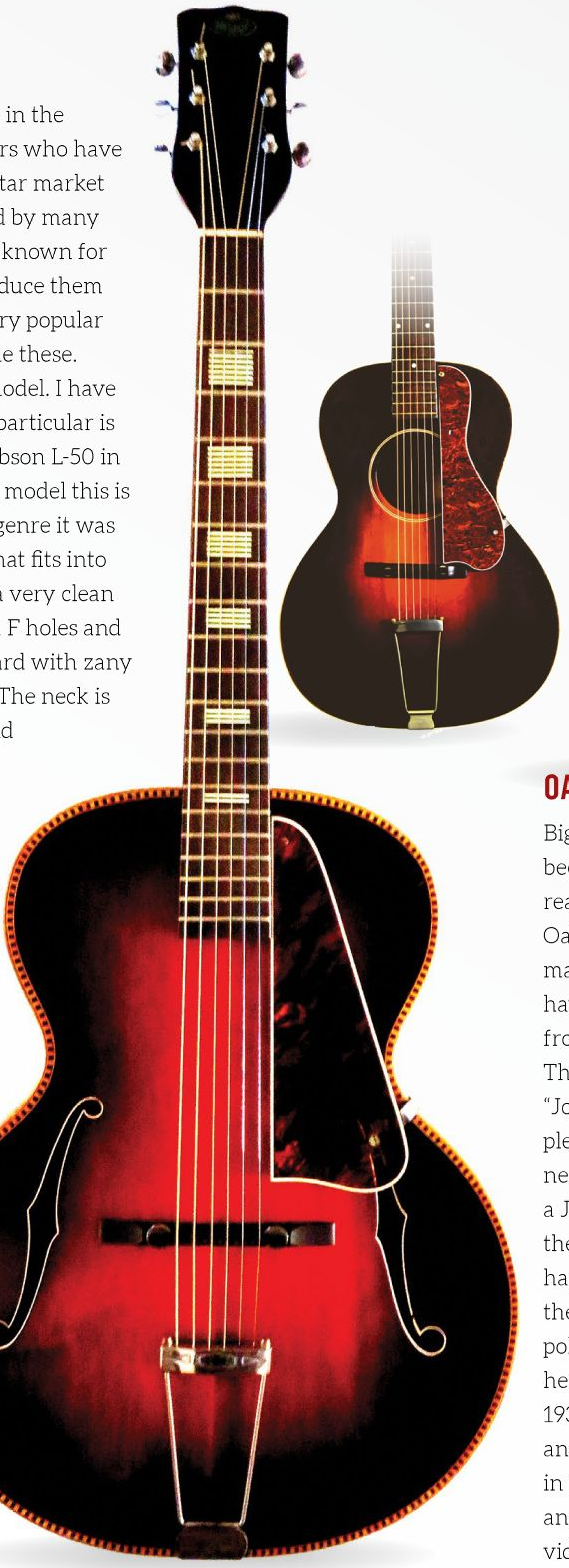
INSIDE COLLECTION
PAUL BRETT

The vintage guitar expert talks archtops and jumbos, and marvels at a 'sole survivor'



REGAL VS GIBSON

Here are two guitars that fulfil similar functions in the historical timeline. First up is one by Regal guitars who have been a major player for years in the acoustic guitar market and their models over the ages have been played by many legendary players. They are probably more well known for their resonators than anything else and still produce them today. In the early days, when archtops were very popular with guitarists across the genres, Regal also made these.

A rarity in Regal archtops was a carved-top model. I have several Regal archtops from the 30s and one in particular is a rare, carved-top model. It's very similar to a Gibson L-50 in many ways and it's difficult to find exactly what model this is in the Regal catalogues. It fits perfectly into the genre it was created for and kicks out a punchy chord tone that fits into lots of different rhythmic situations. It also has a very clean lead tone and solid wood carved spruce top with F holes and tonebar bracing. It also has a dyed maple fretboard with zany motifs which I have not seen on another Regal. The neck is also similar to Gibsons of that era being C-cut and very comfortable to play. Of course, this style of guitar fits a different world to modern guitars but to me, it is a rare find and the trim and purfling add a beautiful finishing touch to a guitar from another era that has survived the years in great condition.

The second archtop we have here is a 1930 Gibson L-4 archtop, roundhole model. Not as elaborate in finish as the Regal, but far more documented than the former and of course made by Gibson. It is rare in this form compared to its brother that has F holes as opposed to a round soundhole and at the time, F holes were far more popular in archtop guitars than roundhole models. Gibsons have always been far more in demand than Regals but in many cases, the sound and make quality is not far apart. Both models were made for similar uses and do their respective jobs really well, although in market price, Gibsons are always far ahead of Regals. **https://youtu.be/034-bnNXc6o**

OAHU

Big, beautiful Jumbo guitars have always been made by brands over the years. I have a really great Oahu jumbo made in 1938 by the Oahu Publishing Company. Whilst they did make a Spanish version of their 71K model, I have the same, only the neck was reprofiled from an Hawaiian style neck to a normal one. Their published mantra at that time reads "Johnny was a guitar player – Very hard to please – Whenever he played in public he was nervous and ill at ease – One day he brought a Jumbo and now I'll have you know – He's the happiest, cheeriest fellow – Wherever he happens to go". Their top-of-the-range model, the Oahu De Luxe Jumbo, even had Waikiki polished, genuine pearl inlays and retailed at a hefty $158 dollars, which was a pricey guitar in 1938. Oahu produced a small range of guitars and my one was the second highest-priced in their range. Condition is great, no cracks and complete gold decals. Take a look at the video: **https://youtu.be/4Zjbq9fSzQY**

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WEYMANN

As a player, collector and historian, when you come across what appears to be a sole survivor in the guitar world, buying it is a no-brainer. I have always been partial to these kind of finds and none more so than a brilliant little parlour size 12-string from the 1920's (pictured played by myself). The brand name on the label is Weymann. Not a well-known brand and long since ended as a company. They are still rated amongst collectors and there are still some six-strings available from that era but I have never seen another 12-string.

Weymann began in the 1800s in Philadelphia and ended in the 1930s. Probably best remembered for their line in tenor banjos, they also made some pretty good mandolins but the 12-string guitar I have is an unusual creation in so far as it has a fixed bridge and a tailpiece, both of which secure the strings. Six pass through the tailpiece and the other six through the fixed bridge. I assume this was to lessen the tension of the table top as the guitar is parlour in size. Brazilian rosewood back and sides with a spruce top, this little gem really kicks out a great sound that belies its size. There is a theory that some Weymanns were in fact made by Martin in the 1920s. When I spoke to Dick Boak of Martin Guitars he said he wasn't aware of any surviving documentation to back this up. However he didn't discount the theory that some instruments may have been made by Martin at that time.

> "Buying the Weymann was a no-brainer"

Another interesting feature on this instrument is the rake on the headstock, which is set back more than any other I have come across. This really adds to a tightening of the string tension and action of the guitar. As there seems to be no historical information on these 12-strings, I cannot state whether the original actually had a fixed bridge that took all the strings or if the one I have with the split bridge/tailpiece was the original. Whatever, in the form I found it in it works perfectly.

I used the basic concept of this guitar in the design and creation of my Vintage signature 12-string but without the dual concept. I decided on using the fixed bridge to secure the strings and add more under-table strengthening. This guitar idea in its modern form is released by Vintage guitars and there is also a 6-string brother in the same design. I have kept the raked, slot headstock too. The 12-string is a 12-fret model and very easy for six-string players to play all the way up the fretboard. Here's the video:
https://youtu.be/8ntCOwvtzWI

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IBANEZ AVD10E

Golden brown, texture like sun? Bring on the new £629 Ibanez for extra brownie points, says Joel McIver

Placed squarely at the lower middle of the acoustic guitar market – some distance from the affordable £250 guitars that we all know and love, but a long way away from your £3,000 handmade instruments – this spanking new Sitka and mahogany guitar is a genuine thing of beauty. Adorned with a 'brown violin sunburst' finish, one of the nicest ways we've seen of saying 'brown' in recent times, the AVD10E (it stands for 'Artwood Vintage') is accompanied by much PR about its 'thermo-aged' X bracing, which we assume means they heated it during construction.

This apparently gives the instrument extra volume and frequency range, so we're looking forward to plugging in and giving it a test drive, although we can't reasonably be expected to analyse the exact function of the bracing without taking it apart and gluing it together again (something which we're pretty sure that Headstock Distribution wouldn't like). The guitar also comes with a cunningly-designed bridgepin design, which may not sound like much until you're forced to change a top E string in front of an intoxicated crowd demanding to hear 'Mustang Sally' for the seventh time. It's touches such as this which make a useful guitar into an essential one – so let's see how it delivers.

BUILD QUALITY

For £629, you're getting a superbly-assembled guitar. The spruce top, with its lustrous finish, plus that expensive mahogany back, combine to provide a feel and texture like few other instruments at this price point. Many of the guitar's features are familiar – the white ivoroid binding, the bridge and scratchplate among them – but there's an understated elegance to them all. The body, at five inches in depth, is full but not overpoweringly so, and features the usual set neck, a front strap button under the joint (as is so often the case these days) and a rear button that doubles as a jack input. There's a battery compartment down there, complete with red LED, but there are no controls of any kind – so you'd better trust your ears, your sound guy or preferably both.

"A feel and texture like few other instruments at this price point"

High points, to this reviewer at least, are the super-small Grover tuners, which are rounded, finger-friendly and lightweight without feeling insubstantial. Again, the machine head design may seem like a mere detail compared to the obvious larger features such as the body woods, but any gigging guitarist will know how crucial they are when it comes to performance efficiency and headstock balance. The neck, a beautifully smooth and slender chunk of mahogany, is also one of the most player-friendly features of the instrument. The fingerboard, with 14 accessible frets of the standard 20, may just be a slab of maple, but it's hard enough for a satisfying fretting experience while not feeling too unforgiving. The rear finish of the neck is sleek and fast-moving, and the dimensions are very accommodating indeed. I tend to prefer a slim neck profile for ease of navigation, and this one is not only slender, its slight dimensions also extend up to and into the headstock, itself a relatively slim item. Guitarists who prefer a baseball bat-like neck should definitely look elsewhere.

Oh, and those bridge pins? Genius. We changed out a few strings to get used to the feel of the bridge, and the design of the pins – grippy rather than slippery – will be the toast of many a live guitarist. If you've ever lost a bridge pin down the back of the sofa (or worse, down the back of the stage) then you know what a massive pain it is to fix. Ibanez's solution may go some way to remedy this.

SOUND QUALITY

Apply pick to strings and you're instantly rewarded with loads of volume; this is a dreadnought-sized body, and the decibels that it emits are to be expected, but it's still a pleasure when a guitar amplifies your playing as readily as this one does. There's plenty of boom at the bottom end; indeed, the higher mids and top end are slightly overpowered by the Ibanez's muscular bass response, so if you're after

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glass-shattering highs, consider other options. However, we breed reviewers tough round these parts, and just because a scintillating treble response isn't there on first picking up a guitar, that doesn't mean we just roll over and give up. Let's dig in near the bridge with a medium-thickness pick, to start with. Plenty of high mids can be achieved that way, although warmth rather than snap is the central tonal characteristic of this guitar – and there's only so much you can do. So let's plug in.

Hooked up to your favourite amplifier and played with the amp's EQ flat, we discover

IBANEZ AVD10E

NEED TO KNOW

Manufacturer: Ibanez
Model: AVD10E
RRP: £629
Body Size: Dreadnought
Made In: China
Top: Spruce
Back and Sides: Mahogany
Max Rim Depth: 5" (127mm)
Max Body Width: 15.75" (400mm)
Neck: Mahogany
Fingerboard: Maple
Frets: 20
Bridge: Maple
Nut Width: 1.7" (43mm)
Scale Length: 25.6" (651mm)
Weight: 4.5lbs (2kg)
Onboard Electrics: Ibanez Custom Electronics Preamp, Ibanez T-Bar undersaddle pickup
Controls: None
Tuners: Grover
Left Hand Option: Yes
Finishes Available: BVS (brown violin sunburst)
Gig Bag/Case Included: No

ACOUSTIC TEST RESULTS

Pros: Amazing neck, impressive volume, build quality
Cons: Tone range is merely adequate; no controls
Overall: For £600-odd, you're getting a whole lot of Ibanez; perfect for the bedroom or studio

ACOUSTIC RATING

Build Quality: ★★★★☆
Sound Quality: ★★★☆☆
Overall: ★★★★☆

CONTACT DETAILS

Headstock Distribution
www.headstockdistribution.com

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a soothing, smooth tone that rewards the fingerstyle of your choice. Tune down to dropped or straight D and the Ibanez will love you for it, purring along with a warm tone that suits swamp blues and folk. Lovers of DADGAD will enjoy the power behind droned chordal passages, while acoustic punks (think Frank Turner or Ade Edmondson) will admire this guitar's understated strength. Try playing a doomy number by Black Sabbath or Metallica, ideally assisted by an overdrive pedal, and the instrument really comes to life.

Still, if you really do hanker after zippy, cracked-ice highs, you won't get them here – and sadly, there's no way around this in the absence of an on-board EQ. Guitarists who are willing to splash out £600 on a guitar are likely to be professional or semi-pro performers, and with that in mind, the ability to roll on mids and treble – the lifesavers in any muddy live mix – is essential. Without these tools, this instrument's applicability in a live situation is

> **"Acoustic punks (think Frank Turner or Ade Edmondson) will admire its understated strength"**

dramatically reduced. A shame, as its design and assembly feels flawless.

CONCLUSION

Ah, let's be charitable. Sure, there are no tone or volume controls on this guitar, and the tone range is reasonable rather than resplendent – but in both cases, that's why they invented preamps, right? And plugging in is only one of the instrument's functions. Play it as nature intended and you'll be impressed with the organic nature of its sound, assisted by the superb playability and a build quality that seems to go way beyond the usual parameters of this midmarket pricetag.

You'll be more than fine with the splendid AVD10E, whether you're laying down chords in your bedroom or on stages of any size. We're impressed with its pricetag and its very playable neck, too. All in all, it's a fitting entry for the last issue of *Acoustic*! ■

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PRS SE T40E

PRS's new line of acoustic guitars has been making waves, says Ollie McGhie

At this year's NAMM show in California, PRS unveiled an impressive array of six brand new acoustic guitars. The name of one of these latest Paul Reed Smith instruments – the SE T40E – sounds like it could be the latest robot in the most recent Star Wars franchise. Let's unpick it so we know what we're dealing with. SE is the series the guitar belongs to, described as 'High-value acoustics with a familiar appeal.' The T stands for the Tonare body build (Tonare translating as thunder) as opposed to the Angelus (or angel) cutaway, which also features in the SE Acoustic series. The 40 refers to the combination of woods used to make the guitar – in this case, ovangkol back and sides with a solid spruce top. The other guitars feature maple or mahogany back and sides. The E stands for Electronics.

The guitar arrives for review in a smart, well-built black hard case. Inside, the guitar nestles snugly in its place. The solid spruce top sports a fine amber grain, stark against the black lining of the case. The Tonare shape gives the main body a wide belly so the ebony bridge looks almost central from some angles. The soundhole is decorated with double rings of white and black acrylic. What is most distinctive is the tiger acrylic sandwiched into these rings. This tiger acrylic shimmers like a mother of pearl and while it isn't particularly stripey, it does capture the lighter tones of the spruce top with the darker wood of the back and sides. This same material spans the circumference of the top so it gives the guitar a superior, classic quality of finish.

Rising up from the soundhole the dark ebony fingerboard contrasts well with the lighter spruce top. You can't but make mention of the bird inlays. Whilst they border on the gimmicky side, they are still functional, appearing where all marker dots would usually appear. They also are inlaid using a rather respectable mother of pearl which works well with the tiger acrylic.

The headstock shape brings to mind the stylised comic book Bat-Signal ,but more than that, its jagged form feels like it's intended for a rocker's guitar, not acoustic merriment. Fans of Carlos Santana, one of PRS's signature artists, would be proud. In spite of the jagged design the silver, metallic coloured PRS designed tuners have a simple aesthetic, which stops the general appearance of the headstock seeming too edgy. The cursive signature logo, which sits between the upper and lower tuning heads, adds a personal touch to the design, giving the guitar a more hand-crafted feel too.

> **"Fans of PRS signature artist, Carlos Santana, would be proud"**

Removing the guitar from its case, the ovangkol back and sides are joined together with smart white body binding. Ovangkol is a dense, heavy wood. While you may not be so familiar with the name of this particular type, it is used widely across the guitar industry from Yamaha to Taylor and Ibanez in the construction of all types of guitars – both acoustic and electric. On this SE model the ovangkol back and sides reveal a rich brown grain with a texture not dissimilar to corrugated copperfoil.

The SE T40E produces a well-balanced sound. The guitar's USP is probably the evenness of the projection across the bass, mid and treble – consistently strong. It delivers a reliable sound across the fingerboard with minimal gutteral noises too. That's not to say the guitar doesn't have its sweet spots. There are some fine harmonics and the upper strings certainly have some sweet tones but the general feeling I get from this guitar is that it wants to be played loudly. It is, in essence, an extrovert – so possibly not the instrument for those who prefer the mellower, smaller sound. It's not a dreadnought, but it wants to be.

One reason the projection is strong might be in the guitar's unique combination of the more traditional steel-strung 'X' bracing with classical fan bracing under the belly of the guitar. This means that the top has effectively a rounder, freer sound enabling considerably more projection. Combined with the comparatively larger sound provided by the Tonare build, and a hard bone saddle for swift transference

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of sound, there is plenty of oomph to support either fingerstyle or plectrum-playing.

My preference on this guitar is for plectrum and chordal playing. Fingerstyle is good too but the guitar really needs a seasoned acoustic professional to bring the most out of it. No cut-away leaves the top end trickier to handle for the left hand. The action is set up so that there's a reasonable distance from the strings to the fingerboard with plenty of space for the strings to resonate. As a consequence the left hand does need to work a little harder to navigate the mahogany fingerboard. The right hand and

PRS SE T40E

NEED TO KNOW

Manufacturer: PRS
Model: SE T40E
SSP: £715
Body Size: Tonare Grand
Made In: China
Top: Solid Sitka spruce
Back and Sides: Ovangkol
Neck: Mahogany
Fingerboard: Ebony
Frets: 20
Bridge: Ebony
Scale Length: 25.3" (642.6mm)
Electronics: Fishman GT1
Controls: Rotary - Volume & Tone
Tuners: PRS-Designed
Left Hand Option: No
Finishes Available: Just this finish
Gig Bag/Case Included: PRS Hardshell Case

ACOUSTIC TEST RESULTS

Pros: Consistently big projection across the strings
Cons: There's more sweetness when it's plugged in
Overall: It packs a 'thunder' punch, has a clean finish yet is geared for the advanced player

ACOUSTIC RATING

Sound Quality ★★★★☆
Build Quality ★★★★★
Value for Money ★★★★★

CONTACT DETAILS

PRS
www.prsguitars.com

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arm feels very comfortable, aided by the big curve of the body. There's a lot of movement and it's easy for the right hand to change up the tone as the music dictates. It just needs a bit of extra control when wielding the bigger sound. As such, this guitar isn't for beginners, it is for the more advanced acoustic player. Even classical crossover artists might have a little bit of trouble with this one.

Given the natural volume of this guitar you'd think there would be almost no need for the addition of electrics but there they are – Fishman GT1. There's an undersaddle pickup and a soundhole mounted preamp which includes volume and tone controls. These are discretely placed in the soundhole and easy to use. Through an amplifier the guitar sounds possibly sweeter than when unplugged. The upper register becomes an even sweeter place to play, especially if you throw in any vibrato.

Bryan Ewald, artist and clinician for PRS Guitars, describes the guitar's sound as being, 'not as bright as the maple guitars, or [having] as much mid range as the mahogany guitars.'

"For the advanced player, this guitar is a worthwhile investment"

Without these other guitars for comparison it's hard for me to make similar comments, but the general sound of the guitar is a bright one and I wouldn't necessarily have said that it was lacking anywhere in the mid-range. Ewald also recommends the guitar would be suited for more solo playing, rather than it being used in a band setting. For the advanced player there's certainly more to get out of it and the robust sound of the guitar certainly supports this. Guitarists Martin Simpson and Tony McManus are two such advocates for PRS acoustic models.

At £715 this is no budget model, though it does include the hard-shell case and there's an adjustable truss rod for bespoke fine-tuning of the action. For the advanced player this guitar is a worthwhile investment. The PRS SE T40E is no C3PO or R2D2, but it certainly has enough character to bring your musical performances to life. ■

FAITH NEXUS VENUS CUTAWAY ELECTRO COGNAC

Alun Lower tries a guitar that strikes the perfect balance between a workhorse and show pony…

Faith truly do deserve credit for the breadth and variety to their catalogue. Even the most cursory of looks at their website reveals a company that has just about every possible niche well and truly covered. Whether it's the stripped-back, rugged appeal of the Naked series, the opulent and exotic tonewoods found on the high-end Signature series or the diminutive delights of the humble Nomad series – every single possible need is catered to, and often with wonderful results. So where next for the guitar builder that does everything? The answer to that question seems to be a new combination that seeks to take the purity and simplicity of the Naked series and jazz it up a little. As such, much of the Nexus' features are inherited from the all-mahogany Naked Venus electro cutaway. The original is already a wonderful guitar, and so at £50 dearer this new version surely has to offer a few compelling reasons to splash that bit more cash?

BUILD QUALITY

Quite so, as it happens. The biggest and most obvious change that Faith has bestowed upon the Nexus models is the new finishing options, which consist of two rather fetching new stains that enhance the solid mahogany body natural looks rather than paint over them. Our example is finished in 'Cognac' but the 'Black Copper' finish is well worth looking up on Faith's website, too.

> **"Fingerboard and bridge blend as beautifully as you'd expect"**

The Cognac finish is a little more subtle as it takes the natural reddish brown of mahogany and just makes it that bit deeper, darker and more dramatic, as if you'd taken a photo of the guitar and saturated it in post-production to bring the colour magically to life. It's easy to imagine the wood having been taken from an old whiskey or cognac cask, making the name rather apt. The wood grain really pops as a result, aided by the silky smooth lustre of the expertly-applied gloss finish.

For all that the new colours add to the visual appeal of the Nexus, the guitar isn't overpowered by decorative appointments. There's no binding to speak of, so the only other flourishes are the unmistakable 'F' logo on the 12th fret, an abalone rosette and further abalone dots on the ebony bridge pins holding the strings in place. The nut and tuners are pitch black, while the Macassar figured ebony fingerboard and bridge blend as beautifully as you'd expect. The look in general strikes a nice balance between austerity and flamboyance – refined and arresting without being 'busy'.

The Venus shape is as lovely to behold as it always has been – its relatively shallow body and easy curves make for a balanced fit on the lap and superb playability. This is a guitar that will suit any playing style and feel easy to play for all kinds of guitarists, but at the same time never feels generic in the way that so many similarly-proportioned guitars can, thanks to the striking and accomplished design. It's familiar, accessible and inviting – just what you want when you pick up a guitar the first time.

The Nexus isn't just a pretty face, either; a Fishman Isys+ preamp and Sonicore pickup complete the feature set (gigging guitarists will also be pleased to find a second strap lock on the heel of the guitar), offering a plug'n'play

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level of versatility that means you don't have to keep the Venus' good looks to yourself. It's a basic but well-regarded unit, coming equipped with a built-in tuner plus volume, bass and treble rotary controls as well as a phase switch for keeping feedback under control.

While the Nexus does so many things right, the only blot in its ledger is slightly rough finishing on the frets. It's a common occurence on guitars in (and sometimes, above) this price range, but there is just a hint of that scratchy feeling when you bend strings, and so it's worth mentioning for those that may wish to address that at some point.

FAITH NEXUS VENUS CUTAWAY ELECTRO COGNAC

NEED TO KNOW

Manufacturer: Faith
Model: Nexus Venus Cutaway Electro Cognac
RRP: £649
Body Size: Auditorium
Made In: Indonesia
Top: Solid mahogany
Back and Sides: Solid mahogany
Max Rim Depth:
Max Body Width: 15" (381mm)
Neck: Mahogany
Fingerboard: Macassan Figured Ebony
Frets: 20
Bridge: Macassan Figured Ebony
Nut Width: 1.3" (34mm)
Onboard Electrics: Fishman Isys+ / Sonicore
Controls: Volume, bass, treble, phase switch, tuner
Tuners: Faith precision black
Left Hand Option: No
Finishes Available: Cognac, Black Copper
Gig Bag/Case Included: No

ACOUSTIC TEST RESULTS

Pros: Lovely looks with smart features, versatile tones and modern hardware choices.
Cons: Fret polishing could be slightly smoother.
Overall: Good looks, workhorse performance and serious value for money. What's not to love?

ACOUSTIC RATING

Build quality: ★★★★☆
Sound quality: ★★★★★
Overall: ★★★★☆

CONTACT DETAILS

Faith
www.faithguitars.com

SOUND QUALITY

There are a lot of factors that come into play with an all-mahogany instrument. It's easy for a such a guitar to sound a little honky and unrefined, limited in tonal range by a combination of tonewood, body shape and bracing design. The Nexus thankfully suffers no such ailment, and what you get is as pure an expression of the delights of mahogany guitars as you could possibly expect for under £1,000. The mid-push is there of course, creating a wonderful punchy presence that loves being played hard, whether that's with a plectrum or fingerstyle. There's plenty of snap and depth to chords and single-note runs alike, with most of the tonal focus on the mid and trebles. The low end is plummy and satisfying, but obviously doesn't have quite the thundering presence that a larger body with different tonewoods would provide. Pleasingly, the Nexus is equally happy with a softer approach, revealing a depth of tone that belies its modest price tag and works for just about any genre you could care to play. Alternate tunings work wonderfully on this guitar, with a bit of open D proving an absolute joy.

> ***"I see a lot of guitarists forgetting how much time they've spent in the shop"***

CONCLUSION

In my time with the Nexus Venus, the thing that struck me most was the fact that I forgot I was reviewing it. It's just so inviting and effortless to play, and takes no time at all to feel like your guitar. It's got to be one of the best all-mahogany six-stringers I've tried at this price, and I can see a lot of guitarists forgetting how much time they've spent in the shop before hurriedly reaching for their wallets. Minor fret-finishing issues aside, this is a wonderful instrument that sounds wonderful and looks a lot more expensive than it is, all without falling into the trap of looking gaudy and gimmicky.

Faith has knocked it out of the park once again, and on this evidence, I can't wait to see what niche they go for next. ■

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MESA/BOOGIE AR2X ACOUSTIC ROSETTE

Mesa's first foray into the acoustic world is a lot of money for an amp, but is it a lot of amp for the money? Sam Wise finds out

Randall Smith's Mesa/Boogie is often referred to as the first boutique amplifier company; since 1971 at least part of his time was spent on amplification; initially molding Fender Princeton amps for higher gain, and later, their own high gain amps. These have reached legendary status, but those saturated high gain tones are the opposite of the completely transparent clean tones we look for in an acoustic amp. Whether Mesa's high end audio expertise can make that transition is a question that can only be answered by trying this very fine-looking amp out.

And fine-looking it certainly is; I've never owned a cream-coloured amp, so I can't speak to how it will respond to five years of pub abuse, but out of the box, it's very handsome. The styling nods to Mesa/Boogie amps from the electric guitar world, but at the same time, looks like a classy acoustic amp. We have a simple cream, tolex enclosure, protected on the bottom and rear top corners with real leather reinforcements, and with a slant to the front instrument panel which, at least for this very tall reviewer, isn't enough to make the controls easily visible. Below the slant, the grille covers two 8" speakers, and on the top, there's a solid leather strap that feels both secure and luxurious. That front panel is a forest of controls, 23 knobs, six mini toggles, and 11 LEDs make for a display that's either impressive and intriguing or imposing, depending on your preference for complexity. To me, it looks like a playground, and I want to play. Additionally, the Acoustic Rosette comes with one of the most comprehensive and verbose manuals I have ever seen; Mesa Engineering put a lot of time and thought into this amp, and they would like to be sure you know it.

What's on offer on the front panel looks standard; there are two channels, one with a jack and an XLR, and one with a jack only. A clue to what's different is the mini toggle to switch between the inputs on channel 1; normally this isn't necessary as they both go to the same preamp, but Mesa have equipped this unit with a specifically designed mic preamp for extra low noise, compared to a dual purpose preamp. There are mute switches, which mute all outputs for either channel, so you can use an inline tuner safe from having your efforts heard by anyone else. Both channels have a phase switch, which produces noticeable changes in tone, and can help reduce feedback problems. Inputs aside, both channels are identical; there's a gain control and a four-band EQ (sweepable high and low mids let you select exactly which frequencies to boost or cut) for each. The FX send controls how much of the post-gain signal goes to the internal FX unit (or to the external FX loop, which deactivates the internal unit). There is a single FX master control, which means that FX level for each channel rises with gain, or can be raised or lowered independently per channel, and/or raised and lowered in the total mix for both channels. Hi-Pass filters help control the pervasive low frequency feedback that plagues amplified acoustic instruments.

"Mesa Engineering put a lot of time and thought into this amp"

The internal FX processor has room and hall reverbs, and a chorus plus room reverb. There are three parameter controls, which in the reverbs control reverb time, hi cut and lo cut filters, or with the combined effect, the amount of chorus and reverb, and the chorus rate. The FX master and master volume at the extreme right end allow control over the main mix, which can be useful for making large scale adjustments during performance (turn it up mate! Too much reverb!).

The back panel is similarly busy; there's a speaker output (of course this is a combo, and there is a cable hardwired to the speaker cabinet that's generally plugged in here, but you can plug into something

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else, should you want for example 12" speakers for greater bass response. There's a headphone jack, which does not mute the main output (you have to unplug the speaker for that), which means that you can practise as silently as an acoustic guitar will allow, but also that you could monitor straight from the amp into headphones on a noisy stage. There are jacks for two footswitches; you can mute either or both channels with one, whilst the other toggles the FX loop in or out. Then there are FX send and return sockets, and the row of ¼" jacks is completed by an aux in, so you can connect devices to play background music (or any other audio source your mind might invent). A nice differentiating feature is the DI outputs; which give you balance XLR outs for each channel and a summed overall output taken post EQ and FX. This means you can use your amp as a stage monitor, and go straight into the desk to get the same tone through the front of house. Even these outputs have a myriad of switching options; all three have a mini toggle between mic and line level outputs, a second for ground lift (in case of earth hum), and the individual channel outputs can be switched between pre and post EQ (they are always pre FX, only the summed output includes FX). In short, it's hard to imagine a more comprehensively equipped amplifier. Perhaps this level of complexity is needed to justify such a high price, but to truly live up to it, it needs to sound great.

> **"Is the Acoustic Rosette good? Yes; it's very, very good"**

Long story short; it does sound great. Despite all the configurability, this is intended to be a "set and forget" type of unit; you tweak it til your guitar sounds like your guitar, and then try to never touch it again. Plugging in for the first time, it's worth knowing that 300 watts is a lot, and if you're in a small venue, or your front room, really start with the gain and master low, because it'll get painful at lower numbers than you might expect. Starting with the EQ set flat, I immediately got something very close to my guitar's acoustic tone. Truthfully, all but the very cheapest acoustic amps I've tried have managed that, but the Mesa genuinely required even less tweaking than usual to get me where I wanted to be, and was very quiet to boot. Having got my guitar sounding right, I then started to push the volume to see how feedback resistant it was; about typical was the answer, but I had more options for taming that hum than I'd normally have (no notch filter though, notably), and I was able to make things pretty uncomfortable in the room where I was testing while still keeping things under control.

The FX are excellent, subtle and useable, and I really had no trouble getting a natural sounding tone I was happy with. Rather than test the mic channel with a dynamic vocal mic, I plugged in my large diaphragm condenser, and tried several guitars against that. The clarity and crispness was excellent, and whilst the feedback resistance is impaired, I could get plenty of volume for most of the places I might use it. I even felt that my duo could work with a single mic and this amp in small venues.

Is the Acoustic Rosette good? Yes; it's very, very good, and it equips you for every occasion, including ones I've never experienced. Is it worth the £1,300 odd price? That's a value judgement only you can make, but I would say it's probably the best acoustic amp I've tried. High price, but high praise. ■

MESA/BOOGIE AR2X ACOUSTIC ROSETTE

NEED TO KNOW

Manufacturer: Mesa Boogie
RRP: TBA – street price £1,300
Power supply: 240V (supplied)
Power Consumption: 300 Watts
Dimensions: 13.25" H x 18" W x 12.25" D
Net Weight: 30 lbs
Frequency response:
Features: Two channels, separate optimised mic preamp, four-band parametric EQ, multiple output options

ACOUSTIC TEST RESULTS

Pros: Great transparent tone, huge feature set
Cons: Expensive, and enough features to become confusing
Overall: This is a really great-sounding amp; take it anywhere, it will not let you down.

ACOUSTIC RATING

Build Quality: ★★★★★
Sound Quality: ★★★★★
Overall: ★★★★★

CONTACT DETAILS

Mesa Engineering
www.mesaboogie.com

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MIC INPUT
PICKUP INPUT
CH 1
CH 2
MIC / PICKUP
LOW MID
HIGH MID
PICKUP GAIN
FX SEND
HI-PASS FILTER
BASS
GAIN
FREQ
TREBLE
FX MASTER
MASTER
ROSETTE
300 / TWO:EIGHT
MESA
ENGINEERING

POWER
OFF
ON
MESA/ROSETTE™ ACOUSTIC AMPLIFIER
MADE IN PETALUMA, CA WITH THE WORLD'S FINEST MATERIALS
DIRECT OUTPUT
SPEAKER OUTPUT
HEAD PHONES
MUTE FTSW
FX BYPASS FTSW
FX RETURN
FX SEND
AUX INPUT
CHANNEL 2
CHANNEL 1
FLAT
OFF
4 OHM
ROSETTE™ ACOUSTIC
CROSSOVER NETWORK

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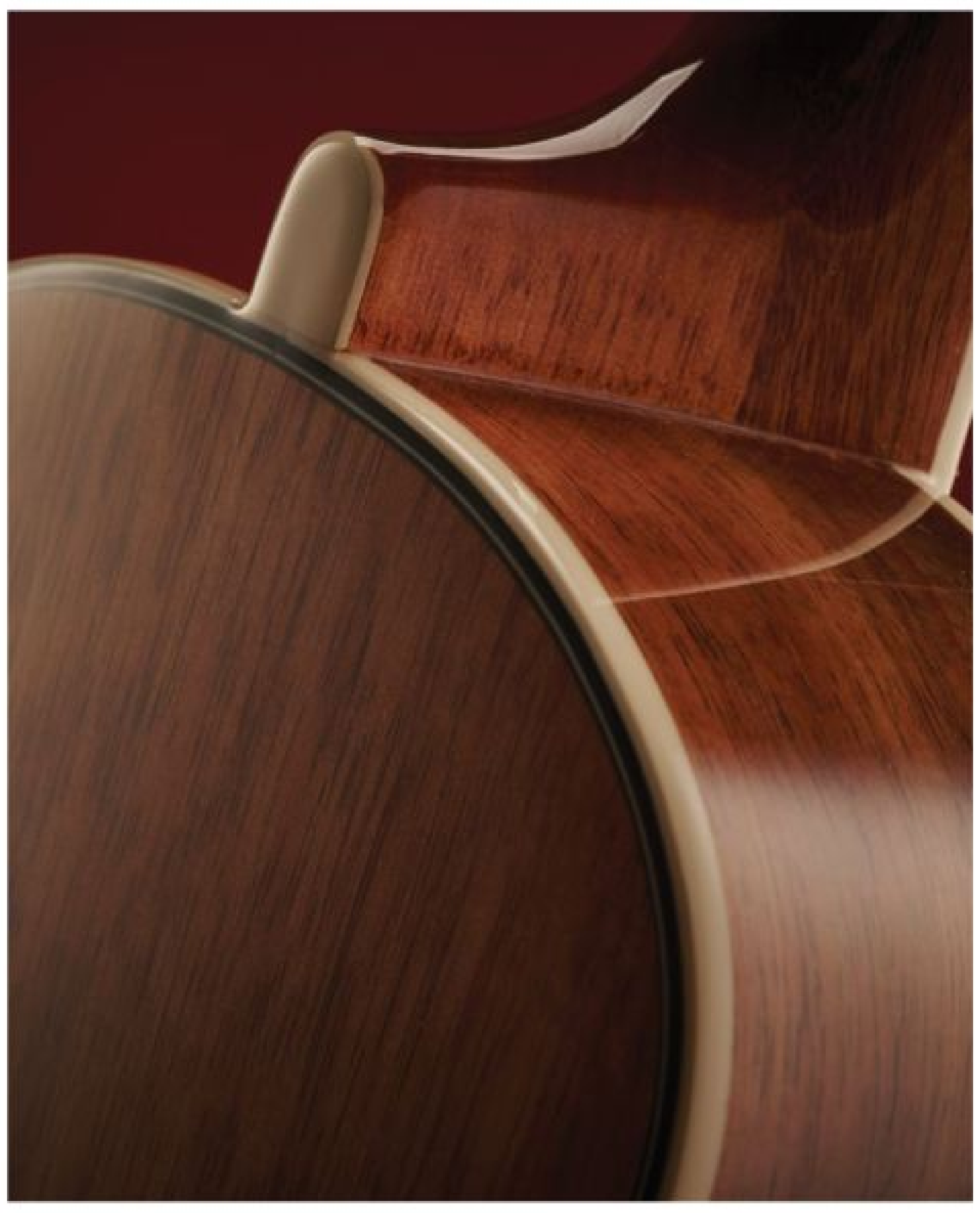
FENDER MONTECITO UKULELE

It's a uke that looks like a miniature guitar! Joel McIver utters the F word



This Fender Montecito ukulele – a £210 koa-bodied tenor-sized uke made in Indonesia – is an unusual creature on first sight. Who is it aimed at? Dissatisfied ukulele players or guitarists looking to downsize? Perhaps both, we reckon, and the only way to find out if the Montecito delivers the goods to either demographic is to whip one out of its case and give it a whirl. The results are below, but before we get into it, let's consider the pricetag.

Two hundred quid and change is a lot of money for a ukulele in the golden age of cheap instruments in which we find ourselves. You could buy a perfectly decent full-sized acoustic guitar for that amount (titter ye not; we reviewed a £195 Gretsch in our January issue, and it was excellent). We've tested a fair number of ukuleles in other recent issues, and they generally come in at under £150 for a pro-quality mass-produced instrument – and considerably less than that for the kind of uke that you buy just to mess around with in your home studio. What exactly do you get for £210, a funky guitar headstock aside?

BUILD QUALITY

No disrespect to Gibson and the many other fine guitar companies out there, but Fender is the most recognisable axe brand of them all, at least in the electric world, thanks to their pioneering Stratocaster and Telecaster designs. Of those, the former was essentially an evolution of the latter, and it's a Telecaster headstock which you can see on this ukulele. And why not? You can't blame Fender for exploiting their back catalogue, and in my humble opinion this instrument looks all the better with a Tele head on it. A few Fender fans may be tempted to explore uke world as a result, which can only be a good thing. Purists won't like it, but then, they never do.

> **"This uke is a serious contender, simply by virtue of its timbers"**

On reviewing any ukulele, whatever its design and pricetag, the first thing any of us should do is give the tuners a solid tweak. The instrument just doesn't work unless they function solidly and without slipping. We've reviewed more than a few ukes (no names, no pack drill) with beautifully-designed and constructed bodies, but whose useless tuners make you want to chuck the damn thing out of a sixth-storey window. Life's just too short to retune every five minutes.

Fortunately, the Montecito's ballistic properties will remain untested today, as the square-boxed tuners are tough and well-built, with no sign of detuning after a couple of heavy strums. Again, a certain number of uke traditionalists will dislike the electric-style aesthetic, but life would be boring if we all shared the same opinions, right?

The top is this instrument's main luxurious touch, with the bookmatched halves of koa wood seamlessly assembled on top of less glossy, unlaminated sides and a back of the same material. The overall effect is great; this uke looks like a serious contender simply by virtue of its timbers. The neck isn't quite as fancy, made as it is from a relatively humdrum nato sandwich, but it feels very playable despite the slightly grippy finish.

Fourteen accessible frets make the instrument's range perfectly workable, and the solid, uncomplicated rosewood bridge with a bone nut rounds the Montecito off satisfactorily.

SOUND QUALITY

Let's get playing. The first impression you get on placing pick to string is that the action is very nice indeed – the first sign of a high-quality ukulele. Given the weeny scale of the instrument, and the mass of the neck versus the tension of the strings, action height has

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always been a failing in uke-land; however, the Montecito has no intonation issues that we can detect. On top of the that, the string tension is friendly, with vibrato easy to achieve and a full response from each of the strings.

Strumming chords is always the best way to reveal the full character of a uke, and although there's no scratchplate and heavier picks may well score that lovely koa top, we suggest that big chords delivered with gusto is the territory where this instrument is most comfortable. The tone range is pretty reasonable for a ukulele, ranging from the boxy sound achieved by picking near the bridge to a much warmer tone if you pick over the soundhole or indeed over the fingerboard itself.

As with most tenor ukes, the sweet spot is just behind the soundhole; focus your picking there for a balance between soft and hard tones. We're pleased to report that there's no

FENDER
MONTECITO UKULELE

NEED TO KNOW

Manufacturer: Fender
Model: Montecito
RRP: £210
Body Size: Tenor
Made In: Indonesia
Top: Koa
Back and Sides: Koa
Max Rim Depth: 2.75" (73 mm)
Max Body Width: 8.75" (225 mm)
Neck: Nato
Fingerboard: Rosewood
Frets: 19 (14 accessible)
Bridge: Sonokeling rosewood, bone nut
Nut Width: 1.4" (34 mm)
Scale Length: 17" (430 mm)
Weight: 1.5 lbs (0.69 kg)
Onboard Electrics: None
Controls: None
Tuners: Fender
Left Hand Option: No
Finishes Available: Koa
Gig Bag/Case Included: Gigbag

ACOUSTIC TEST RESULTS

Pros: Superb woods, tones and tuners
Cons: No pickup, despite the hefty pricetag
Overall: This beautifully designed uke is highly playable – but you'll need a pickup to maximise its potential

ACOUSTIC RATING

Build Quality: ★★★★☆
Sound Quality: ★★★★☆
Overall: ★★★★☆

CONTACT DETAILS

www.fender.com

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obvious 'Tupperware zone'; the dreaded point at which your uke sounds lifeless and plastic.

Flatpicking and fingerpicking each have their place here, although the Montecito doesn't offer bags of volume given that it doesn't have a pickup (more on that below), so hang onto that plectrum just in case. The clarity of the tones at the top and in the mids is definitely among this uke's strengths, and the strings 'speak' individually, again a sign of good design.

Here's a minor whinge. The Montecito doesn't come with a pickup, despite its price point and the obviously 'rock' look that the headstock supplies. I can't help but think that Fender have missed a trick here, as this uke is going to appeal to performers who want to play gigs that are bigger than a living-room. Sure, you could stand in front of a dedicated mic, risking feedback and volume spikes if you lean too far forward; an inbuilt pickup plus preamp, maybe with an EQ control, would prevent those issues and add massive value.

We'll readily admit that the Montecito is one of the most playable ukes we've come across, which is no surprise given its cost. Played in a small room with a tiny gathering of listeners,

> **"Purists won't like it, but then, they never do"**

it might theoretically do its job without a pickup, but we wouldn't bet on it. That's our only negative point, though – as far as design, construction and tone go, very few ukuleles have outperformed this one in our recent tests.

CONCLUSION

We really like the Montecito, but unfortunately the lack of stage-readiness lets it down slightly. Man, this ukulele is so perfectly set up for live performance – even the headstock looks ready for the stage! – and yet there's no built-in pickup. If you invest in one, consider attaching one; we've just done a quick internet search and come up with a vast range of options. The range goes from a DIY piezo unit for £2 (yes, you read that right) which will undoubtedly break after 30 minutes of use, all the way up to a pickup more costly than the uke itself.

Add your chosen unit to this instrument and you're all set for a rather tasty stage uke that should (operative word 'should') repay your £210 with years of service. Be prepared to answer endless questions along the lines of 'Here mate, why's it got a Telecaster headstock if it's a ukulele?', of course... ■

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TOON LAUWERS

Belgium-based Toon Lauwers reveals to Emily Bielby the truth about why the art of lutherie and the acoustic guitar mean so much to him

WORDS: EMILY BIELBY

"Growing up in a family of musicians, the choice of playing an instrument came almost naturally to me," says Toon when asked about his journey into the art of lutherie. "As a small boy, I fell in love with the guitar but when I was 16, my wrists got tendonitis, which forced me to stop playing intensively and look for a solution to this problem. A toolbox came, string tension changed, string heights were destroyed and fixed and the guitar-building microbe took over my entire life. Being able to create something as beautiful as a guitar, with nature's best and the most beautiful woods, for professional and exceptional talented guitar players… it almost sounds like a dream.

"Going to my workshop with a cup of coffee and being able to work only on your first love, the guitar; probably the best job I will ever have. Thanks to my open-minded parents and my guitar teacher Dirk De Hertogh, who is an instrument builder also, I got my introduction to the wonderful world of lutherie. In Belgium we are spoiled to have some great lutherie schools. As a teenager I graduated at the International Lutherie School of Antwerp (ILSA) and afterwards I had the chance to study under the guidance of Walter Verreydt at the Center for Musical Instrument Building Puurs (CMB Puurs)," says Toon.

HISTORY REPEATED

Trying to find something inspiring in every instrument that crosses his path, Toon confesses to being a big fan of historical guitar builders, which are one of the main influential driving forces behind his own designs. "Their instruments give me the impression that they knew much more than we do now… for Baroque guitars, the Voboam family or Antonio Stradivari, for romantic guitars René Lacôte or Stauffer and for classical guitars Antonio De Torres, Enrique Garcia and many more. Belgian builders like Walter Verreydt or Dirk De Hertogh, or Italian builders Andrea Tacchi or Enrico Bottelli, friendly competitors Kristof Meeus and Johan Sarens and many more can really inspire me or push me to the next level.

"Then you meet Ken Parker at a lecture and learn about archtop guitar building and he turns your world upside down," says Toon with a chuckle. "Being able to study, document and copy these 200-year-old instruments is a real privilege, but then some great modern guitar builders can also give you this extra push or extra ideas you didn't think about at first. After a guitar fair I always return home full of ideas," he admits.

Toon who originates from Belgium, attends a lot of guitar fairs, concerts and music schools, which he says are easily accessible despite Belgium being a fairly small country. We talk a bit about Belgium's acoustic guitar scene and whether the art of lutherie is as popular there as it is in other countries. "It is not hard to find a

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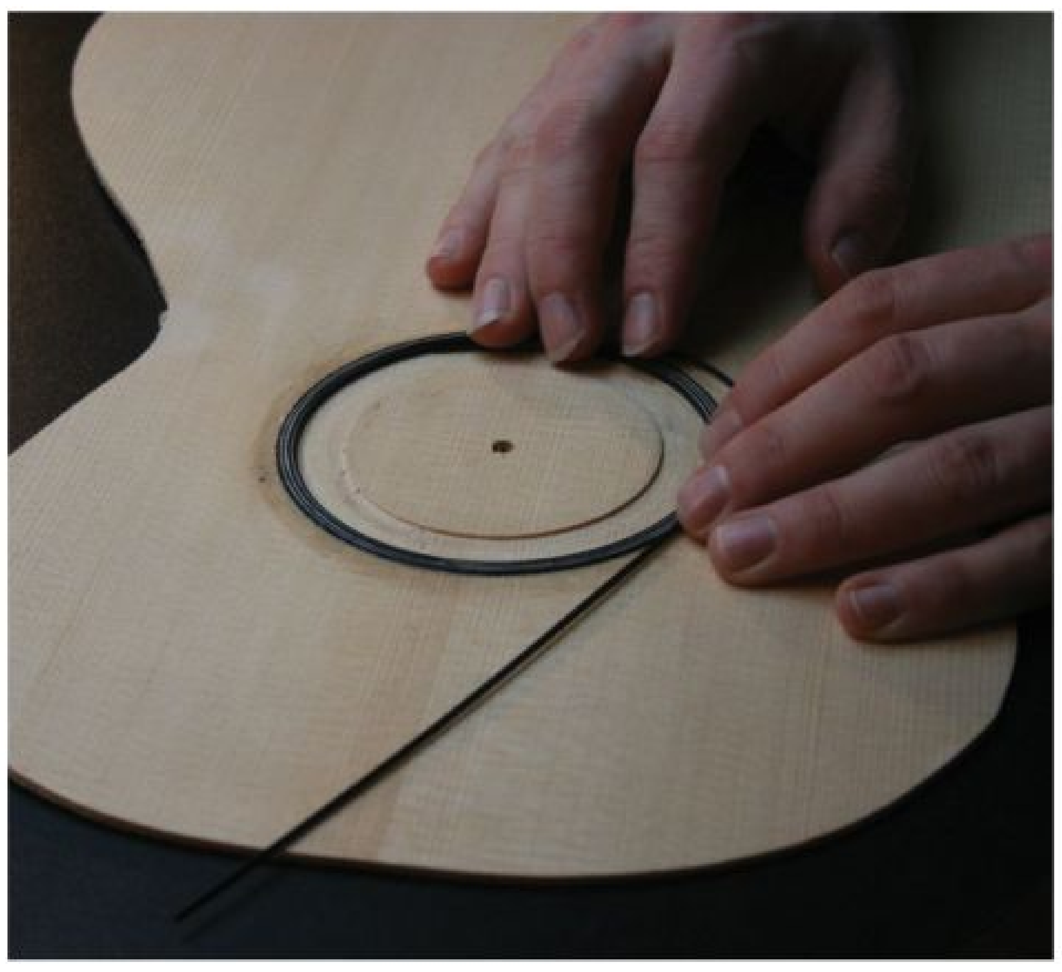
luthier living nearby. I see them more as friends than competition. I am also lucky that the CMB Puurs is only a village away. I therefore always have a second opinion and hand whenever I need one," explains Toon. "The acoustic guitar scene is really nice, we have some great schools with some extraordinarily skilled teachers. Almost everybody is connected and it's really great to be able to talk and discuss with both starting students and professional musicians".

The first guitar Toon ever built was a Torres inspired model with Indian rosewood sides. It took him almost two years to finish and afterwards it stayed with him at least five years in a case before he decided to re-work parts. "When I got more experience, I reshaped the neck, French polished everything from scratch, new set up and fretwork… and as we speak it is played by a very lovely amateur guitar player".

As for Toon's own acoustic collection, guitars come and go. "Every guitar I build is a guitar for a customer. Every guitar I buy or play is a second hand instrument that I completely adapt before I play it, from a Steinberger to a Telesforo Julve. I heave some antique guitars, that came to me in a thousand pieces that I use as study objects, for instance a Belgian 1930 Marius, 1820 Viennese Romantic guitar, some parlour guitars and many more".

Not being a textbook student, combined with his love of playing the guitar, led Toon to look for something different, and in lutherie he found it. But he still recalls his guitar playing days and having been exposed to music very early on, it's no surprise to learn that Toon



could whistle before he could talk. Idolising guitarists such as Paco De Lucía, John Williams and Steve Vai, a young and very keen Toon learned guitar starting out with kitchenware. "I was eight years old but I played drums on the kitchen floor with pots and pans before I could walk and my mother's piano or my father's trumpets were everywhere to reach and try so a family full of musicians offered me an incredible pallet of musical opportunities," he says. "My first guitar was a Spanish Admira, probably made in Asia, it was a lovely guitar and I still have it in my living room. It's an easy-to-access guitar that everybody can play on, without making me nervous about scratches or cracks," he laughs.

MIND YOUR BEESWAX

In Toon's opinion, the perfect guitar is an instrument that can inspire the musician. He elaborates a little more on this theory and explains how he tries to incorporate this in to his own designs.

"While I am building, I always try to keep in mind what kind of player the customer is. The reason someone chooses to work with me is because they have found a connection with the guitars that I make. During the build I am looking for a modern interpretation but with respect for tradition. I only use historical materials such as hot glue, shellac and beeswax. Every branch of the guitar is selected and treated with the greatest accuracy; this makes sure every instrument is a unique piece, a connection between musician and builder," he clarifies.

The conversation moves on to wood choices with Toon detailing how he sources the woods for his craft. "Mostly I use spruce for the tops, cedar or mahogany for the necks and the sides change from Indian rosewood, maple, satinwood or mahogany but it depends on the model I am making. I always select my woods manually, I go to specialised saw mills in Germany, Italy or Spain, to select exactly those woods that fulfill my preferences. Nevertheless no piece of old furniture or an old construction beam is safe; if I can find something in it that interests me," he jokes. "Zebrano, aesthetically, is not my cup of tea, especially the smell when working with it – really too heavy for me."

Since starting out as a luthier, Toon has made around 50 guitars, although he admits that some of the restorations take as long and are as much work as making a new instrument. "I stopped trying to count the hours or days that I work on one instrument… I try to make two or three instruments at the same time. Depending on the restorations or repairs that come to my workshop the amount of guitars varies from six to 10 per year."

He tells me about his 2018 building plans. "This year looks like the year of the romantic guitar for me; it seems that this year will be filled with my René Lacôte copies." That in mind, I quiz him about his models most popular with consumers.

"2018 will be a year of Lacôte guitars," he replies, enthusing at the prospect. ■

Info: www.toonlauwers.be/en/home

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THINKING INSIDE THE BOX

Nick Benjamin continues with his series exploring amplification options. This month: mic-mounting

Last month I went through all the main types of pickups commonly used in acoustic guitars; undersaddle (UST), magnetic soundhole mounted, soundboard bugs (SBT) and bridgeplate mounted. Although these many types of pickups or 'transducers' were originally developed to be a more workable live alternative to microphones, it has become very common to mix a relatively low level microphone signal with one of the more feedback resistant pickup choices to try to get the best of all worlds with the mic adding details and ambience and the pickup giving body and punch to the sound. For 'percussive-fingerstyle' players using many techniques that do not relate to the strings of the guitar, mics are an essential part of the amplification process in order that some techniques can be heard at all!

There are lots of ways to mount microphones to an acoustic guitar so that the positioning remains constant. This overcomes one of their main issues, but they are generally far more susceptible to feedback than most pickups, however they are attached, due to the air gap that separates them from the guitar rather than the direct contact that most pickups have. Strong EQ is always required to get the best from a mic mounted on a guitar and this is often built into the preamps of the combination systems I describe further on.

EXTERNALLY-MOUNTED MICS

The position you'd use in a studio is an externally mounted mic: usually a miniature mic on some sort of clamp or gooseneck mount. This is probably the most practical way to use a mic if that is all you want to try, but the relatively close position does mean that you perhaps don't capture the full sound of the guitar. Using an omni-directional mic can help but be more feedback prone perhaps than a directional mic. Either way, positioning is crucial – as are all other aspects of the setup – to getting good results and avoiding feedback.

Pros/cons: May be easier than a mic on a stand but takes some care to make work successfully as a single source not combined with other pickups. Mainly suited to very high quality, well-controlled situations, with in-ear monitoring, rather than wedges, being more or less essential.

Made by: DPA, K&K, Audio Technica and many other mic manufacturers.

SOUNDHOLE-MOUNTED MICS

Usually part of a dual source system combined with another main pickup, this is a very common position found in many well-known systems with both under-saddle pickups and magnetic pickups. The mic is usually an 'electret' style that can be powered from a 9V battery as part of a built-in preamp system. The mount will either be a flexible goose-neck or be attached right at the edge of the soundhole, pointing across it; which is generally the best position either way. Generally the mic will be heavily EQ'd by the built-in preamp ,to remove all boomy low end and produce a stable, detailed sound when combined with the other pickup.

Pros/cons: Good practical and unobtrusive position giving a very usable tone for blended systems where only a small amount of well EQ'd mic sound is mixed into a main pickup sound to add detail and life to the overall

Left to right: B-Band gooseneck soundhole mic and LR Baggs Tru-mic and Dual-Source internal mics

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sound. Relatively feedback resistant if properly set up and used at a low level.

Made by: K&K, Fishman, B-Band, Highlander, D-tar and many others.

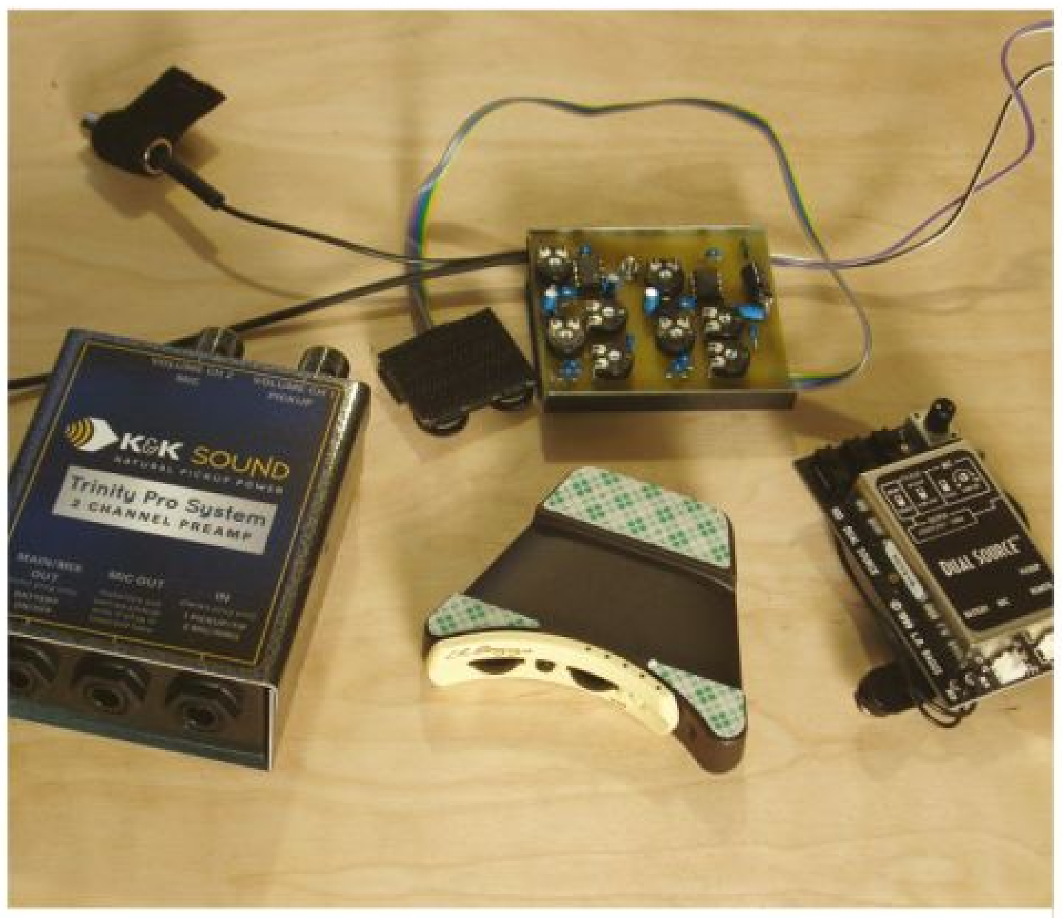
INTERNAL MOUNT MICS

LR Baggs has pioneered the use of internally-mounted guitar mics for many years: first with their Dual-Source mic that mounts on the inside of the back of the guitar, giving a big warm tone that is remarkably feedback resistant when combined with another pickup. More recently their groundbreaking Tru-Mic has been introduced as part of their Anthem and Lyric systems. The Tru-Mic mounts on the bridgeplate much like my personally favoured bridge-plate pickups and, like them, it picks up a very strong, feedback-resistant tone due to the positioning. As part of the Anthem system the Tru-Mic produces all the top end attack whilst an under-saddle pickup gives all the bass and warmth with its top end dialled right down – to be effectively replaced by the sound of the mic in that frequency range. The dynamic, detailed top end produced by the mic sounds very natural and cuts through even in an electric band situation, making this one of the most easy-to-use and great sounding systems available today that is exceptionally feedback resistant and natural, even when strummed hard.

With well thought-out positioning and electronics some great results have been developed using various internal mic positions: mainly by LR Baggs.

MULTI-SOURCE SYSTEMS

I've frequently referred to systems that use various combinations of pickups and mics during my descriptions of the various types. Sometimes we are trying to get the best of both worlds by combining a natural sounding pickup or mic with a feedback resistant one and sometimes we are just trying to offer tonal options by blending across between two contrasting sounds for different occasions.



Multi-source pickup systems usually come complete with an active preamp to blend the sounds. Here are a few examples from K&K and LR Baggs

An iconic combination of K&K Pure bridge-plate pickups and sound-hole mic in their Trinity system

"More isn't always better"

DUAL SYSTEMS

MAGNETIC PLUS MICROPHONE

A classic combo pioneered by ace Scottish luthier Mike Vanden. The warm tone of a nice magnetic pickup combined with a sweet-sounding soundhole mic. Mass produced by Fishman as the Rare Earth Blender, also available in a new version from Vanden as the Mimesis Kudos. Seymour Duncan produce a similar system. Great for finger-style players

A custom combination of Dimarzio Black Angel magnetic pickup and K&K sound-hole mic

UNDER-SADDLE PICKUP PLUS MICROPHONE

Very versatile combination offered by many manufactures including; Highlander, LR Baggs, D-tar and Fishman. Perhaps taken up a level by LR Baggs with their Anthem systems.

BRIDGEPLATE PICKUPS PLUS MICROPHONE

The iconic version of this combination is the hugely popular K&K Trinity system used by many percussive style guitar players: it's very rich and natural with lots of detail and amplifies everything you could possibly want to do to an acoustic guitar!

UNDER-SADDLE PLUS BRIDGEPLATE PICKUPS

Pioneered by LR Baggs with their iMix system and now K&K with their PowerMix. Blend from direct-sounding under-saddle to sweet toned bridge-plate pickup.

CUSTOM COMBINATIONS

You can combine almost any of the pickups and mics I've talked about if you use external blending and multiple outputs but some work better than others so remember more isn't always better: the sounds need to compliment each other and wide ranging EQ and phase control will be essential to achieve good results with custom systems. ■

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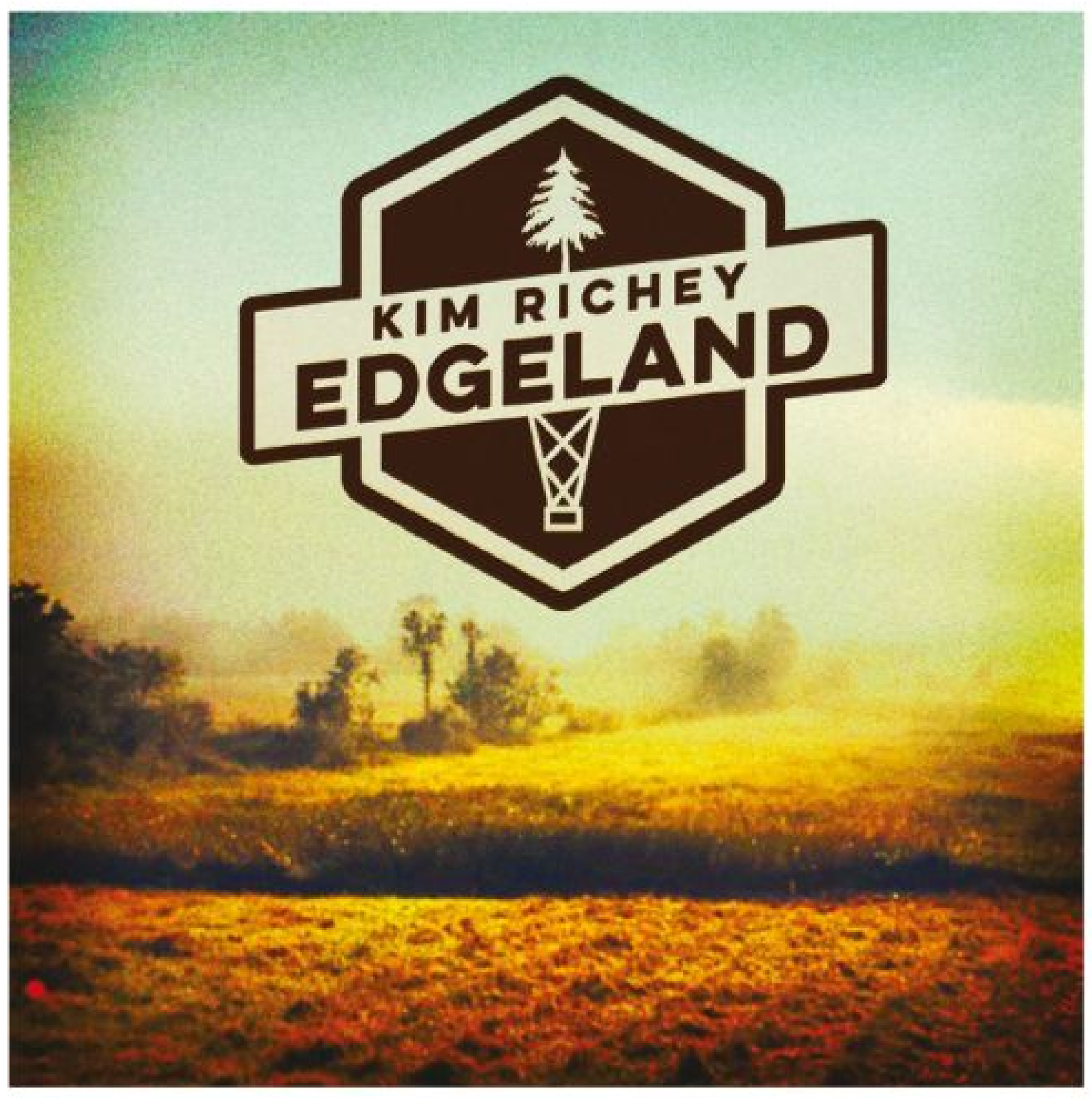
CUA

SONGS OF THE HOLLOW ★★★★☆

WWW.CUAMUSIC.COM

At its finest music should confound and amaze the listener, and this trio from Ireland have the luck – and the ability – to be one of those outfits that can pull this off. Cua's chant 'Lift my soul on the way to the fire' on the opening bars of 'Atlantic Cross', over the ghostly drone of Ros O' Meara's bouzouki, is a moment guaranteed to raise the chill bumps, before the guys let rip into a floorboard rattling jig worthy of Planxty's glory days. But far from being just yet another folk outfit from the Emerald Isle, Cua mould some unlikely influences – 'Waco' could be a Crosby Stills Nash & Young outtake, 'The Other Man' a traddie chorus worthy of the Copper Family. The end result is a treat. **JP**



KIM RICHEY

EDGELAND ★★★★☆

WWW.KIMRICHEY.COM

It must be frustrating to be Kim Richey. Since the release of her debut in 1995, she's had the kind of career that'd be the envy of many, No. 1 hits with songs recorded by division one Nashville stars, her vocals have graced albums by the likes of Jason Isbell and Ryan Adams. Yet she's never quite cracked it in her own right: a pity, because if this album's anything to go by, solo success is long overdue. Boasting top notch players, there's an organic live feel to tracks like 'Leaving Song' and the smouldering 'Black Trees'. In fact every song's a gem and with Ms Richey in fine voice – there seems to be nothing she can't handle - maybe 'Edgeland' will be the one? **JP**

GITTA DE RIDDER

FOR EVERYTHING A SEASON ★★★☆☆

WWW.GITTADERIDDER.COM

The second album by this Dutch songstress is divided into suites of three songs for each season, with the changing seasons mirroring a relationship. Nothing novel in that idea perhaps, but far from being some sloppy emotional maelstrom, there's a seductive earnestness about Gitta's breathy delivery, driving the songs towards the inevitable winter, and seducing the listener along the way. There's the rollicking 'Knowing A Ghost', Gitta imploring 'I Want You To Know Me', and the fragility of 'The Wheel', highlights in a beautifully crafted set of songs, set to Stephen Hodd's minimal arrangements over which Gitta emerges like a butterfly from her emotional chrysalis. **JP**

BEN MILLER BAND

CHOKE CHERRY TREE ★★★★☆

WWW.BENMILLERBAND.COM

Organic is the best word for these Missouri misfits. Led by guitarist Ben Miller, the band originally morphed from an open mic session and features violinist, guitarist and electric cactus player(!) Rachel Ammons and one string washtub bassist Scott Leeper. The thick swampy blasts of feedback guitar and anarchic percussion on 'Big Boy' could be Seasick Steve on a bender, the simple acoustic homespun wisdom of 'Nothing Gets Me Down' a kind of backwoods morality hymn, with Rachel coming on like a sweetheart on the gospel influenced 'Redwing Blackbird'. Ultimately it all holds together in a lovable ramshackle fashion with fun written all over it. **JP**

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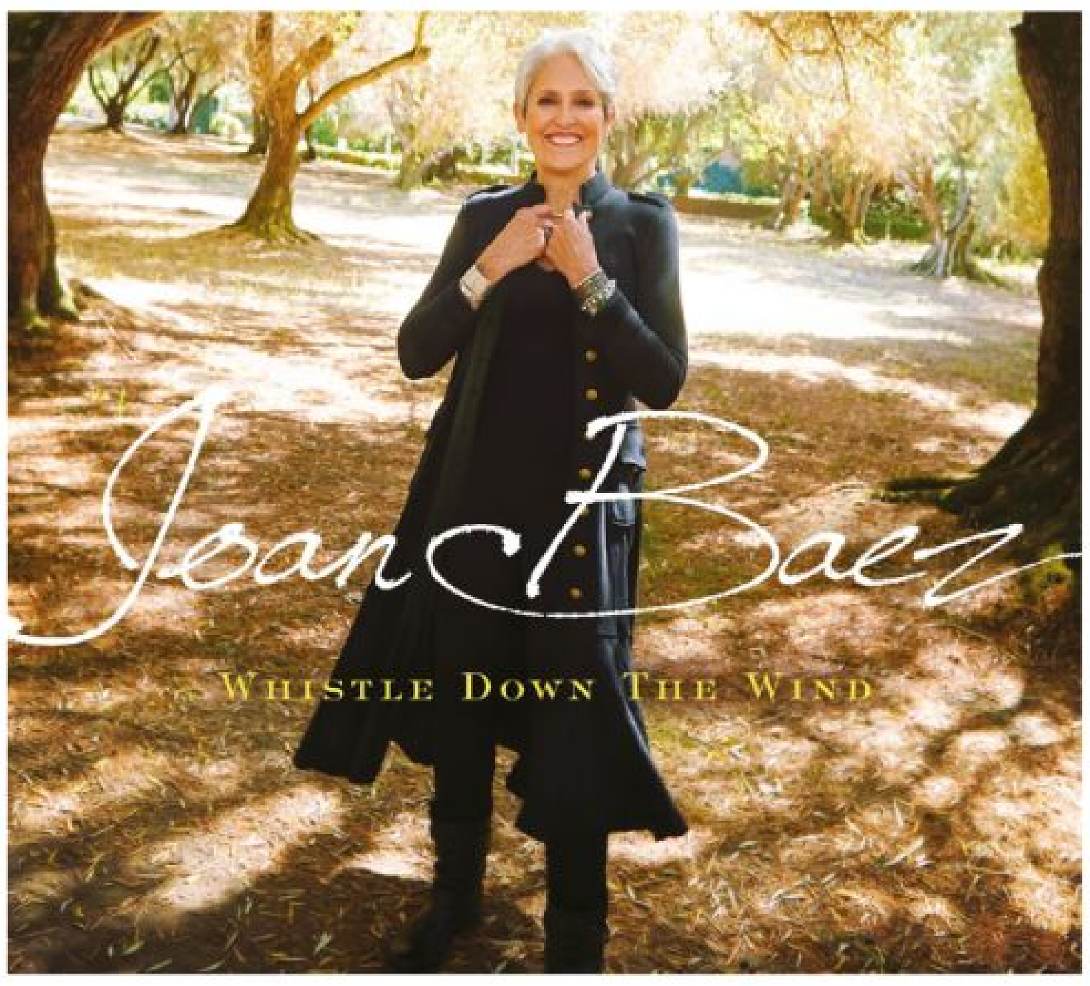
BENNETT WILSON POOLE

BENNETT WILSON POOLE ★★★★☆

WWW.BENNETTWILSONPOOLE.COM

There's an old theory that an album's pivotal moment occurs around track 3; grab them there and they're hooked. Maybe that's why these compadres chose to introduce 'Funny Guys' with Tony Poole's exquisite chiming Rickenbacker 12-string, surely one of the greatest spirit of '66 guitar sounds around? Not exactly a homage to CSN &Y, but the Californian sweetness of the harmonies on tracks like 'That Thing Called Love', leave even the casual observer with no doubts about where this is all coming from. But from the slabs of dark, grungy Neil Youngesque guitar on 'Ask Me Anything', to the glorious wigged out climax of 'Hate Won't Win', a song dedicated to the late Jo Cox, the genetic musical wiring is a treat. **JP**



JOAN BAEZ

WHISTLE DOWN THE WIND ★★★☆☆

WWW.JOANBAEZ.COM

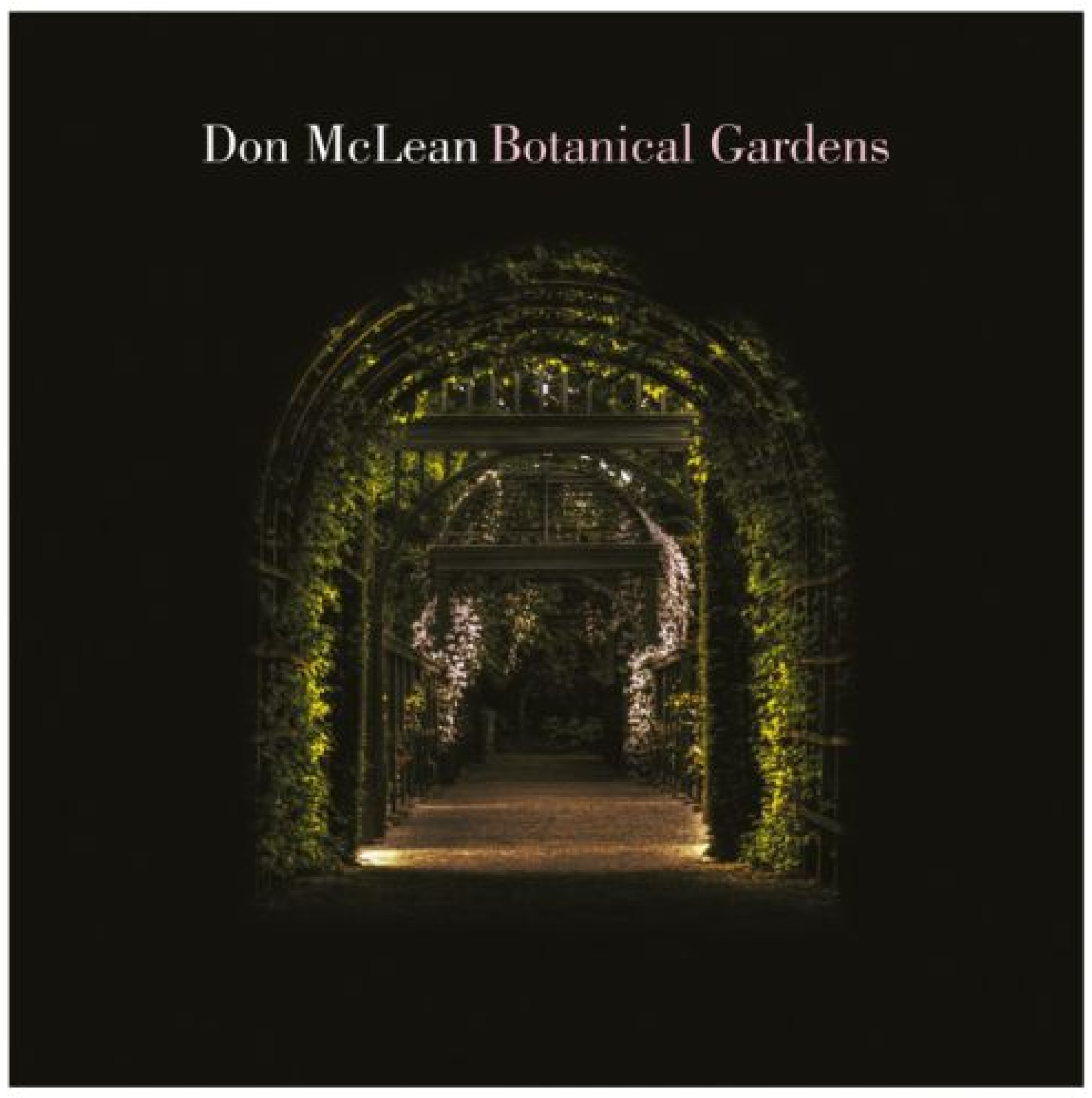
Her voice may have slid down a few semi tones, but on her first album for a decade, the indications are that the passing of the years have been particularly kind to Ms Baez. Producer Joe Henry has kept the instrumentation to a minimum, allowing the focus to fall on Joan's warm, quavery vocals. Songs like Zoe Mulford's 'The President Sang Amazing Grace', a moving tribute to the Charleston church shooting, and the self explanatory 'I Wish The Wars Were All Over', are the reflective musings of a lady whose heart is as resolute as ever. Top marks, though, go to 'Silver Blade', a timeless folk parable by Josh Ritter, with just Joan's wistful vocals and acoustic guitar. **JP**

GLYMJACK

LIGHT THE EVENING FIRE ★★★★☆

WWW.GLYMJACK.COM

What goes around comes around, and with all three members of Show Of Hands onboard, it's no surprise that Greg McDonald's soft, earnest exhortations and hearty choruses on the title track, echo those familiar vocal dynamics. And although this is no SOH tribute album, Greg's songs like 'Made In England', depicting the plight of homeless soldiers sleeping on the streets of London, and the thought-provoking 'Hope Point' about the exploitation of immigrant workers, are the kind of finely crafted songs SOH have long made their own. With a couple of trad songs thrown in for good measure, notably Martin Carthy's 'Bows Of London', and Gemma Gayner's effervescent fiddle playing, this is about as good as contemporary folk comes. **JP**

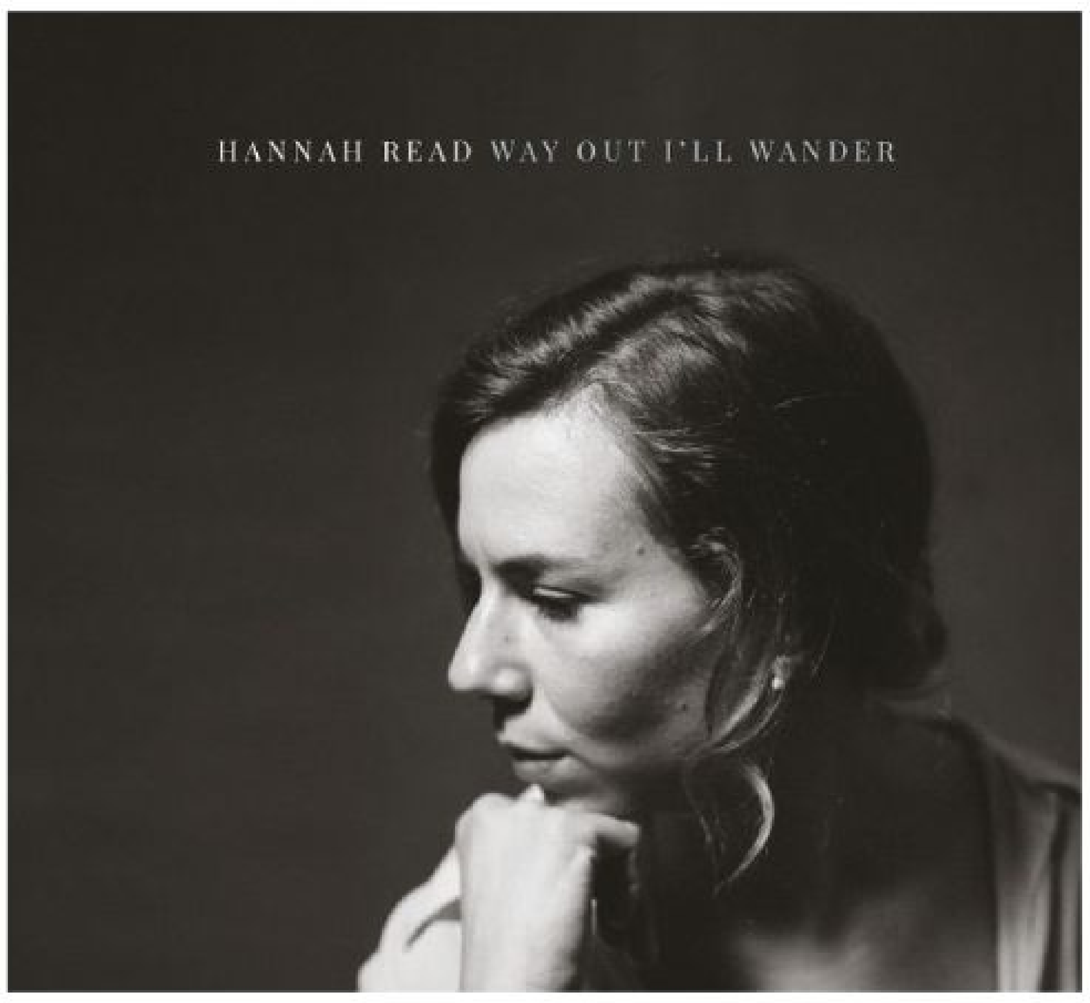


DON MCLEAN

BOTANICAL GARDENS ★★☆☆☆

WWW.DON-MCLEAN.COM

There's something slightly voyeuristic about dialling into Don McLean's oeuvre; after all, here's this guy who's come up with a couple of the classic pub singalong epics of the last half century. Sadly on this showing, whatever creative blast prompted Don to write 'American Pie' et al, seems long gone. Sure he's in fine voice, and there's a funky Nashville twang to the arrangements, but songs like 'Total Eclipse Of The Sun' and 'Ain't She A Honey' – Don intoning 'Ain't she a ripper with a buckle and a zipper', seem no more than the droolings of a man who wishes he could still pull. But hey, at least he's still getting paid to sing about his fantasies, and you can't knock that. **JP**



HANNAH READ

WAY OUT I'LL WANDER ★★★☆☆

WWW.HANNAHREAD.COM

With early days spent playing traditional music on the Scottish island of Eigg, before studying music in Paris and Berklee, and settling in Brooklyn, NJ, Hannah Read has an enviable musical CV. Given her background, there's an obvious transatlantic feel to her songs, but it's her Highland upbringing that shines through, both in her lilting vocals and on songs like the wistful 'Moorland Babe', where she recalls 'dewfrost mountains' and singing curlews. An album that thrives on its spacious arrangements and Hannah's fragile, heartfelt songs, with Sarah Jarosz adding harmonies, there's an inherent beauty to the material. **JP**

JOHN OATES

ARKANSAS ★★★★☆

WWW.JOHNOATES.COM

"This is the record I've always wanted to make," says John Oates, and listening to him breathing oxygen into some of the old chestnuts he's chosen for 'Arkansas', you wonder why it took so long. Left to his own devices with an acoustic guitar picking John Hurt's 'Stack O Lee' or 'Spike Driver Blues', John comes on like he's just stepped off the riverboat, and when he gets to crooning 'Miss The Mississippi And You', it sounds like it just tied up at New Orleans. Unlike some of his peers who've suddenly discovered their 'roots', John sounds as though it's always been engrained in his DNA. It's all a bit of a revelation and a long way from MTV. **JP**

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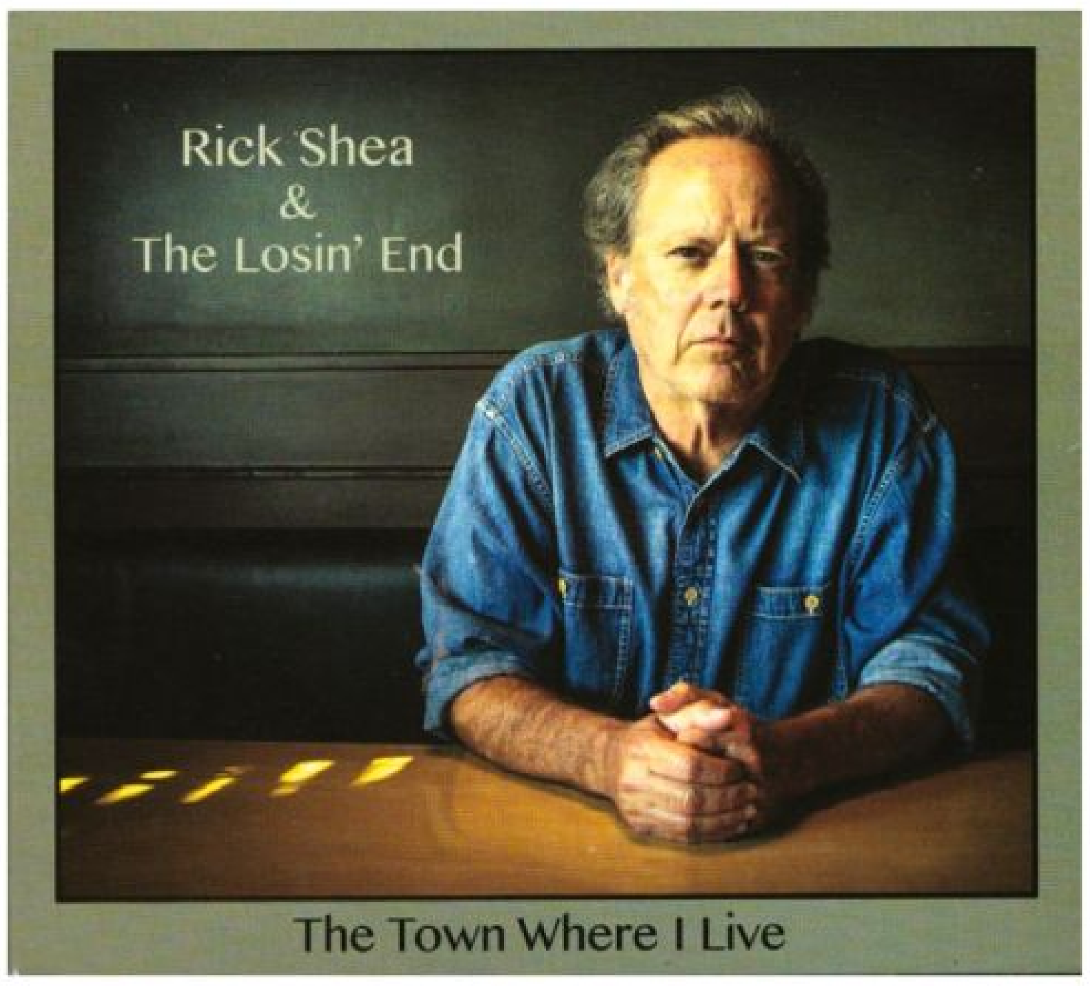
THE DEAD SOUTH

ILLUSION & DOUBT ★★★☆☆

WWW.THEDEADSOUTH.COM

Like Mumford And Sons on amphetamines, from the moment this quartet of speed freaks from Regina Saskatchewan get started with their warp speed bluegrass, the effect is really pretty overwhelming. Propelled by Eliza Mary Doyle's ludicrously fast banjo workouts, for the most part the band rip through tales of lovin', cheatin', killin' and drinkin', taking no prisoners along the way. Respite comes when a lonesome pedal steel guitar introduces 'The Good Lord', before the welcome spaced out calm of 'Delirium'. But it's quickly back to floorboard ripping business as normal, Hillbilly fun of the highest order. **JP**

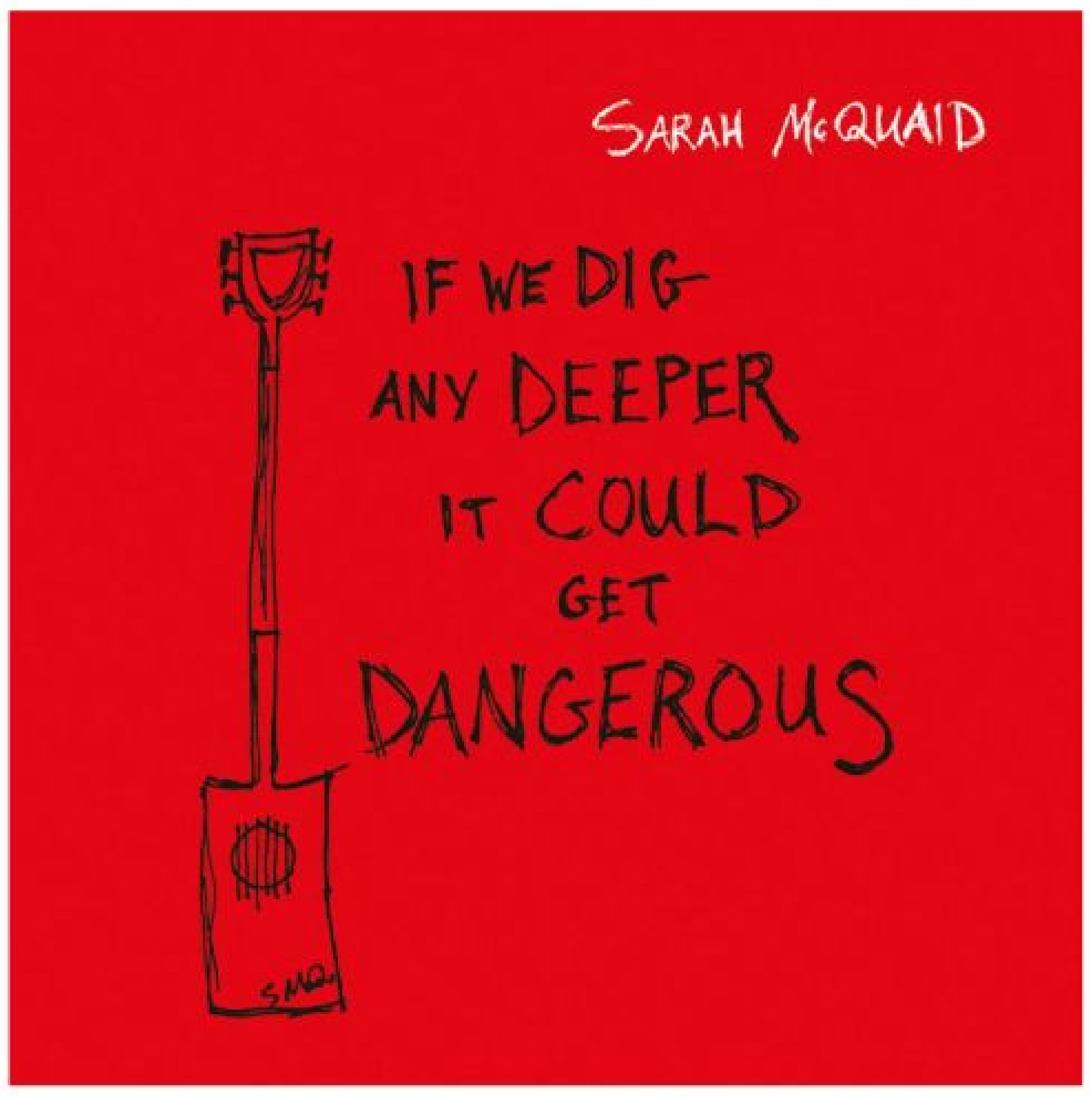


RICK SHEA & THE LOSIN' END

THE TOWN WHERE I LIVE ★★★☆☆

WWW.RICKSHEA.COM

Rick Shea spent time playing guitar with Dave Alvin, and there's a lot of that same slightly glazed Californian ambiance about his songs, music for playing in a Chevrolet pickup trundling into a never ending sunset. No one works up a sweat, and 'Goodbye Alberta' sums it all up, a lazy ballad as Rick bemoans the loss of his love, a distant wheezing conjunto accordion, pedal steel and twanging guitar all falling in line. Rick sings of 'dark clouds hanging low on the road to Jericho', and the 'Starkville Blues', both songs about places we're never likely to visit. But somehow it doesn't matter, Rick's voice has that slightly cracked quality that tells you he's been around and that this is all for real. **JP**



SARAH MCQUAID

IF WE DIG ANY DEEPER IT COULD GET DANGEROUS ★★★☆☆

WWW.SARAHMCQUAID.COM

Sarah McQuaid has long owed as much to her American roots as her adopted Cornwall, but with the county figuring prominently in her lyrics, she brings it all home. Her pairing with Michael Chapman as producer, the veteran folk renegade and the folk waif, was always likely to be an intriguing one. Chapman brings due gravitas to proceedings, adding slide guitar on the doomy Gregorian chant 'Dies Irae', injecting sneaky bits of primordial electric guitar all over the place, a perfect foil for McQuaid's crystalline vocals. It all makes for a slightly melancholic but nonetheless strangely arresting album. **JP**

LUKE JACKSON

SOLO DUO TRIO ★★★★☆

WWW.LUKEPAULJACKSON.COM

Touted as an heir to Richard Thompson, Luke Jackson's undoubtedly one of the most distinctive young voices to emerge on the UK scene in the last few years, and this live album finds him performing before a crowd of rabid fans in a cosy Canterbury cocktail bar. Just why any artist decides a 'live' album is a worthwhile career move, is often a mystery. In Luke's case most of the material is led from his last albums, and songs like the muscular 'More Than Boys' and 'Kansas' will be familiar. What this live setting proves, is that the gold standard quality of Luke's studio albums were no fluke: he's an impeccable guitarist and writes songs that will endure. **JP**

DAMIEN O'KANE

AVENGING AND BRIGHT ★★★★☆

WWW.DAMIENOKANE.CO.UK

Damien O'Kane professes to like finding 'new ways of telling old stories', and from the opening moody synths and echoing electric guitar that introduce his reworking of the traditional 'Boston City', he takes us on an unpredictable trip into the unknown. Infused with tradition, Damien's deep Irish brogue anchors songs. Tracks at times veer towards Dire Straits – the gently rolling 'Poor Stranger' – and the wandering arrangement that introduces the beautiful banjo instrumental 'Castle Kelly's'. With banjo wizard Ron Block and Kate Rusby adding her ethereal harmonies, this is untethered music that acknowledges the past, but doesn't shirk from exploring the present. JP

KYLE CAREY

THE ART OF FORGETTING ★★☆☆☆

WWW.KYLEANNECAREY.COM

This New Hampshire born singer describes her music as 'Gaelic Americana'. Recorded in the Louisiana swamps in the studio of Dirk Powell, a man whose empathetic producing skills have infused a clutch of standout roots albums over the last few years, she's off to a good start. Guests Mike McGoldrick and John McCusker are on hand to add the essential Gaelic feel to Kyle's gentle ballads, McGoldrick's ethereal flute conjuring visions of the Emerald Isle on 'Opal Grey'. It's all very beautiful and Kyle has a voice of an angel, but by about half way in, as one soporific song leads to another, sadly Kyle oozes the calm self possession of a Yoga teacher. **JP**

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JAKE CHARRON

STYLE… FOLK

I'm the guitarist and keyboardist with Canadian folk trio The East Pointers. The other members are Tim Chaisson (fiddle, percussion, lead vocals) and Koady Chaisson (tenor banjo, bass pedals). We formed in 2015 and released our first record the same year. Our second album, *What We Leave Behind*, was released in 2017. It's about moving forward in life and the good and bad things that we leave behind as we go. It has a very Canadian sound.

For live gigs I play a Martin GPCPA1 acoustic. It plays like a small guitar, but with its deeper body it still has great low end. The cutaway also makes it easy to shape chords above the 12th fret. I often play in drop D, but also standard and DADGAD when it feels right. I do play fingerstyle, but mostly use a pick. The GPCPA1 has a built-in Fishman Aura system, with a blend of mics and pickups that gives lots of tonal options. I've become fond of the TC Electronic BodyRez pedal, a one-dial solution. If you're looking for a better acoustic guitar tone, it's magic. I also use an LR Baggs M1 soundhole pickup on my low string, which I run through the Electro-Harmonix POG octave pedal to create a bass tone. It's changed the way I play guitar, and has been great to add low end to our sound on stage and in the studio. I also have an old 1942 Gibson J-45 sunburst at home, and it's great for writing. It plays completely differently from my stage guitar, which often brings out new ideas.

Future plans? We're currently touring the new album, and have a big UK tour planned, starting in London on 19 June. We'll also play a few festivals including Cambridge Folk Festival on 4 August.

Info: www.eastpointers.ca

WHITNEY ROSE

STYLE… AMERICANA

Every song I write is on acoustic guitar. I'm a 31-year-old singer and songwriter living in Austin, Texas and I play a 1965 Gibson LG1, called Aggie. I'm self-taught, and started using a pick about three years ago. I signed with Cameron House Records in 2013 and then Six Shooter Records in 2016. I've released three albums and one EP, *South Texas Suite*, and have toured them extensively.

My latest album, *Rule 62*, was released last October. 'Rule 62' is a term used by Alcoholics Anonymous. It means 'Don't take yourself so damn seriously'. I only found out about it while we were in the studio, and the moment it was explained to me I decided to call the record that. It describes the album perfectly. Though travel is a repeated theme, what I had in mind while writing the material was approaching bad or difficult situations with comedy and a light heart.

My favourite track is 'Wake Me In Wyoming'. The way it came together in the studio is exactly how I envisioned it. I love when that happens. My songs are inspired by the places I go and the people I meet along the way. I don't have a writing process that I'm married to – sometimes I hear a melody first and sometimes I think of a story first. But it always starts with me and my guitar.

When gigging I just DI via PA – I love my guitar, but I'm far from a gearhead. I'm currently preparing for a two-month European tour. I am so excited to be coming back to the UK in May: it'll be my second time in England and my first time in Ireland and Scotland. You can expect mostly *Rule 62* and *South Texas Suite* material, with some of my favourite covers.

Info: www.whitneyrosemusic.com

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SAM CARTER

STYLE… CONTEMPORARY FOLK ROCK

Based in Sheffield, I'm 34 and I sing and play acoustic and electric guitar. As a solo artist, I've released three albums, toured extensively and won the BBC Folk Horizon Award. In 2014 I formed the duo False Lights with singer, songwriter, multi-instrumentalist and producer Jim Moray with the aim of bringing folk and rock elements together in a new way. Our second album, *Harmonograph*, is out now. A harmonograph is a mechanical apparatus that uses pendulums from fixed points to create a geometric image, which to us beautifully represented the differing influences of the band converging to make a coherent whole.

The album mainly consists of traditional songs, arranged by Jim and myself – we feel that we have adequate space for our original songwriting within our own solo projects. My favourite track is 'Far In Distant Lands', because I'm a sucker for a wistful melody. My acoustic guitar is a Richard Osborne Dragonfly J. Made for me in 2011, it's a small-bodied jumbo with custom bracing to suit my low tunings. Beautifully balanced across the strings and frequency range, it's fitted with an LR Baggs Anthem pickup, which goes into my LR Baggs Venue DI and into the PA. I'm mostly a fingerstyle player on acoustic, but sometimes use John Pearse thumbpicks and occasionally hybrid pick with plectrum and fingers. I also use Shubb capos.

I mainly write on acoustic, and all my original songs are in alternate tunings. My 'standard' tuning, if I have one, is DADGAD. I also use DGDGAD, DADEAD, DADEAE, CGDGAD, CGCGCD, CGCGCE, CGDGCD and DGDGCD. I'm currently working on a new solo album scheduled for release in autumn. False Lights are playing Oxford Folk Weekend (20 April), Beardy Folk Festival, Shropshire (22 June), Folk At The Hall, Flintshire (6 July) and Sidmouth FolkWeek (8 August).

Info: www.falselights.co.uk; www.samcartermusic.co.uk

© Dave Harries

LYNNE HANSON

STYLE… BLUES/FOLK/COUNTRY

I started out playing rhythm guitar and singing harmony in 2000, before pursuing a solo career in 2005. Since then I've played to audiences across America and Europe, released six studio albums, and won two songwriting awards. Lynn Miles sang on my first record and also produced two of my albums. We both live in Ottawa, and in 2017 we formed The Lynnes.

Our debut album, *Heartbreak Song For The Radio* has just been released. Our goal was to create something honest and beautiful, both in terms of the lyrical content as well as the production. We recorded to tape, which gives the album a warmth that isn't always there in the digital world. The title track is my favourite. I love sad songs, and Kevin Breit added a tasteful guitar solo that gives me goosebumps.

My main acoustic guitar is a cutaway built by Canadian luthier Oskar Graf. It's deeper than standard and really warm with lots of bottom end, which is why I love it. I mostly DI into a PA – I use the LR Baggs Para DI. I also play a Gretsch Tennessee Rose when gigging. I have a simple pedal setup, and use a Trinity Triton tube amp for my electric – I tour a lot, so minimising the gear I need to carry around is a priority. I play fingerstyle and use a pick. I often use a double drop D tuning, as well as using a partial capo to get a similar effect without altering my guitar tuning. I'm currently working on new material for my next solo album, and I'll be touring Europe and the UK with my own band in October and November.

Info: www.thelynnes.com; www.lynnehanson.com

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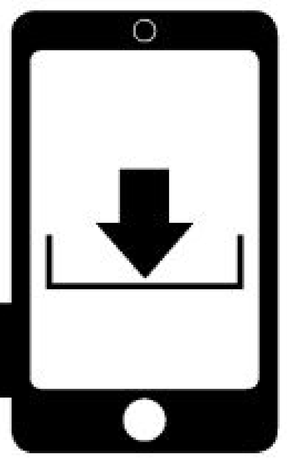


GORDON GILTRAP INSTRUMENTAL ARTIST

'KERRY DANCERS'

Giltrap presents an Irish tune from his now-rare Troubadour album

'Kerry Dancers' is a traditional Irish song and like so many tunes that have come out of the Emerald Isle, is truly beautiful. My arrangement of this piece is the personal favourite of my dear friend Del Newman who arranged and produced *Troubadour* and whose judgment on things like this I hold as gospel. Del is retired these days, but the list of major artists he has worked with over the years is a veritable who's who of music legends from Paul Simon to Elton John, with George Harrison and Cat Stevens along the way. He still has his original orchestral score from the session. Needless to say I'm very touched by that.

On the album version I used three different Rob Armstrong guitars for recording. Starting with a Baritone guitar in a low tuning then modulating up to standard tuning and then finally up to a Baby guitar in a higher tuning. The effect worked well and certainly gave Del a lot of scope for his quite superb orchestration.

I have divided the piece up into a kind of song format with intro, verse and chorus etc, and many of these are repeated with slight variations throughout. The tuning is CGCGCE.

The first eight bars form the intro and note should be made of a tricky finger stretch in bar 3 where the second finger plays the fret 5 string 1, which may be a bit of a challenge whilst trying to keep things flowing smoothly in the lilting 3/4 time signature. In bar 6, the third finger remains in place on fret 9 string 4, from the previous bar.

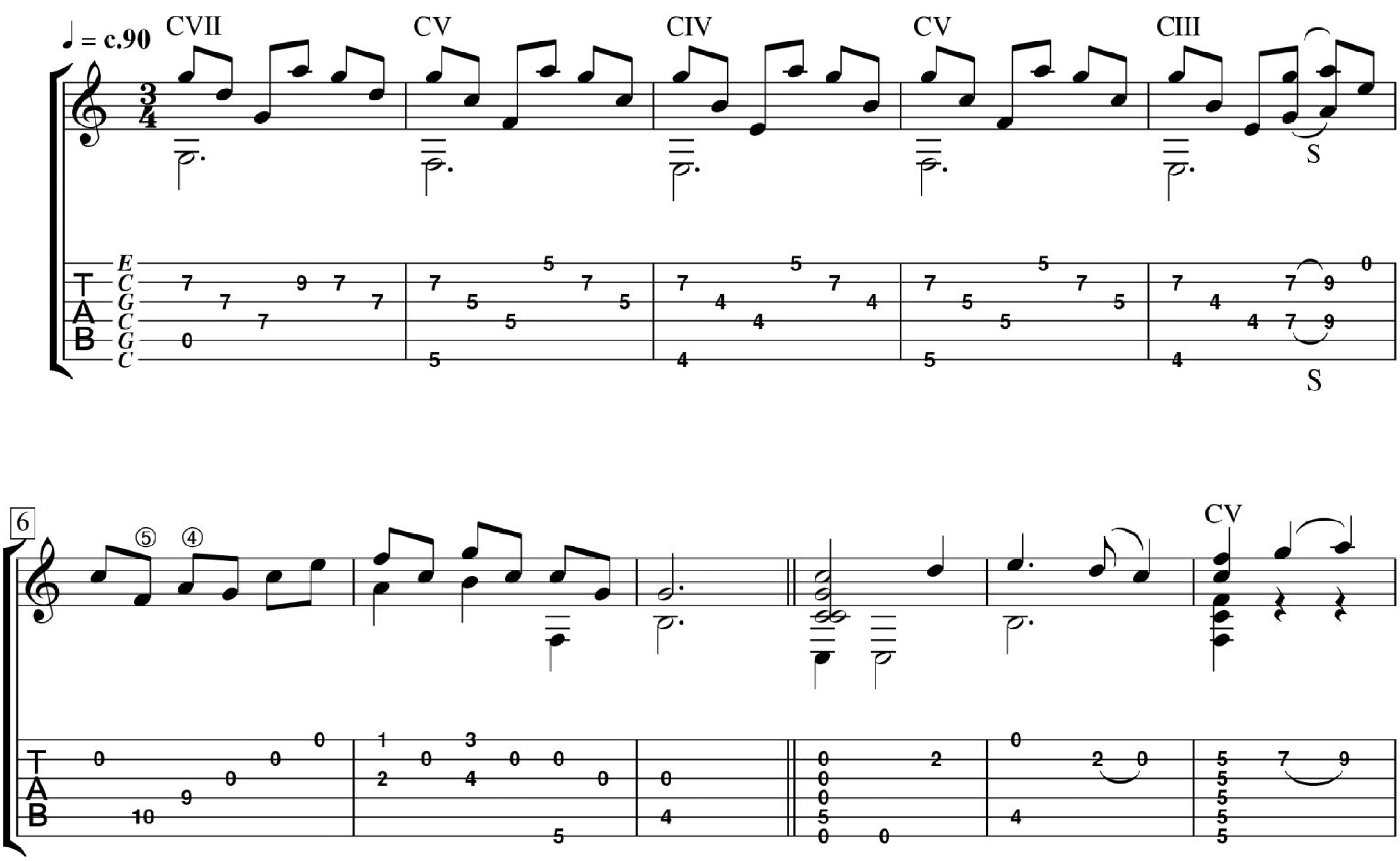
Bar 9 begins the verse section proper. In bar 17, I suggest the first finger should be used to execute the hammer and pull section here. In bar 25 the intro appears once more with the same challenging second finger position.

Bar 41 and 74 reveals what I call the chorus, and various repeated sections follow on. Most of the fingering is pretty straightforward and I don't want to confuse the player here with too many finger suggestions. I like to think that most of what is written should follow a fairly logical pattern.

A metronome setting of 90 should give you a clear idea of the tempo. I like writing pieces in 3/4 time which I feel adds an almost lyrically romantic feel to the whole thing. I'd like to thank my wife Hilary and her late mother Elizabeth for steering me in the direction of this beautiful old Irish melody.

Although *Troubadour* is out of print, one can still hear it on iTunes. I hope to get it re released one of these days as it's an album that is very close to my heart. ■

'KERRY DANCERS'



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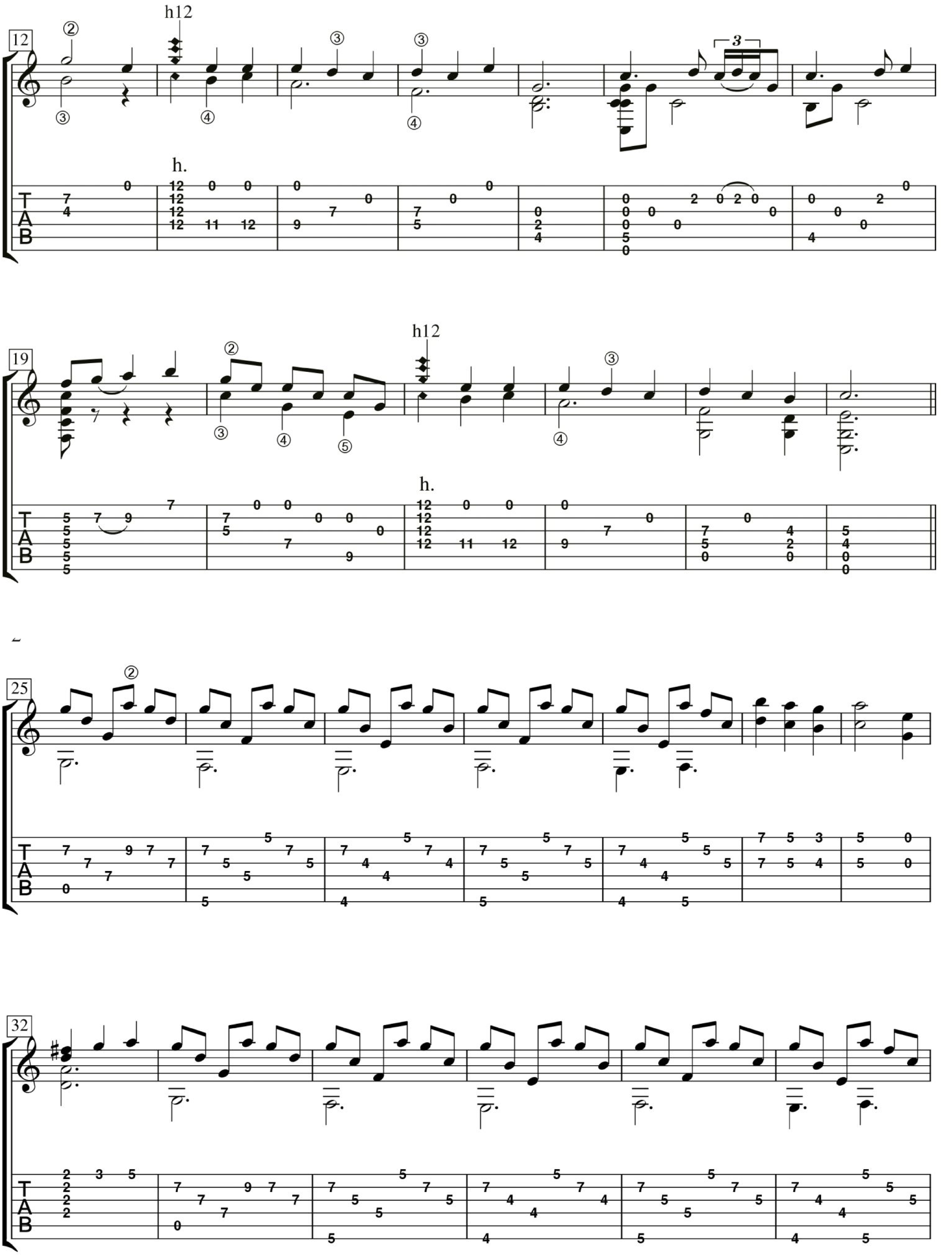
'KERRY DANCERS' (CONTINUED)



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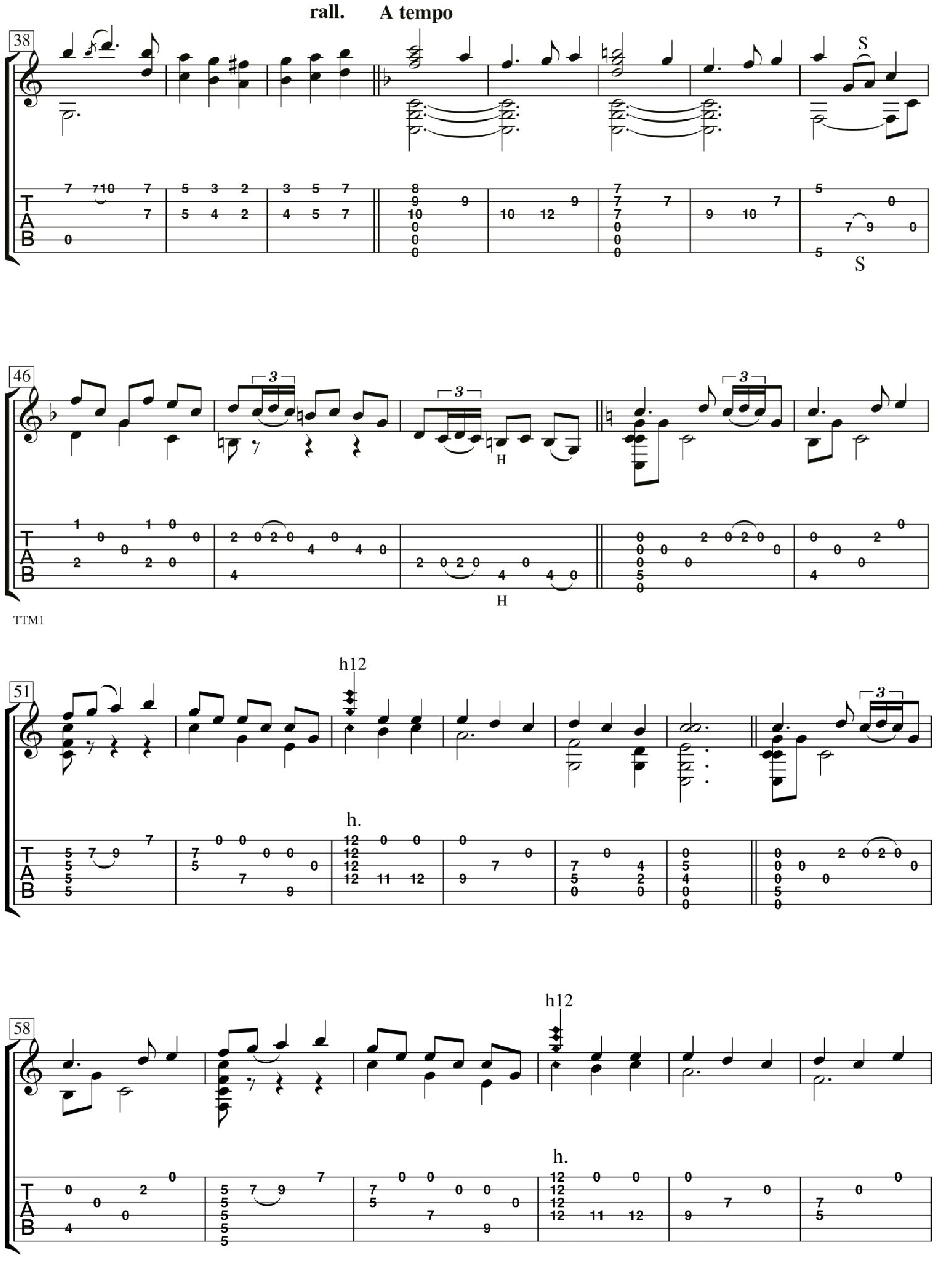
'KERRY DANCERS' (CONTINUED)



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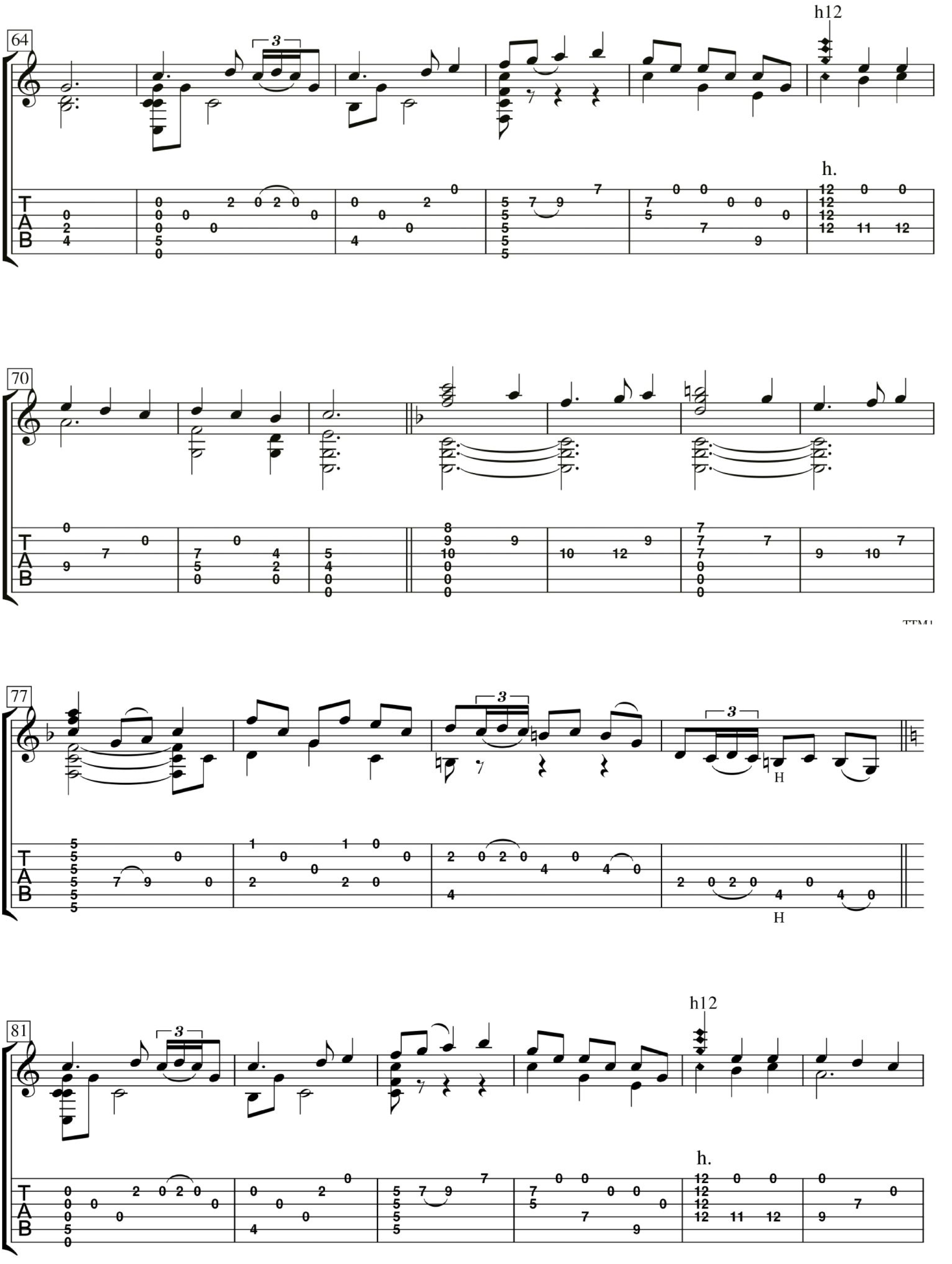
'KERRY DANCERS' (CONTINUED)



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CHRIS GIBBONS COMPOSER

BUILDING CHORD SOLOS

Gibbons explores some of the techniques used

Once learned, the skills needed for creating chord solos can be applied to a variety of styles. The first technique we will look at is voicing passing tones through common chords. Very often, a song will have a melody that threads its way through a chord that does not change.

EXAMPLE 1

Here is a simple melody in the key of C. First play just the melody to get a sense of the tune, then play the tune with the chords based on the simple C shape in the open position. You can hear how the melody passes through the chords, you can call the non-chordal notes (D, B etc) 'passing tones' if you like.

So these two bars are a first try at constructing a chord solo, with one drawback: it'll be challenging to move it to other keys. Also there's something harmonically to be gained by keeping the chord static and moving the melody against it.

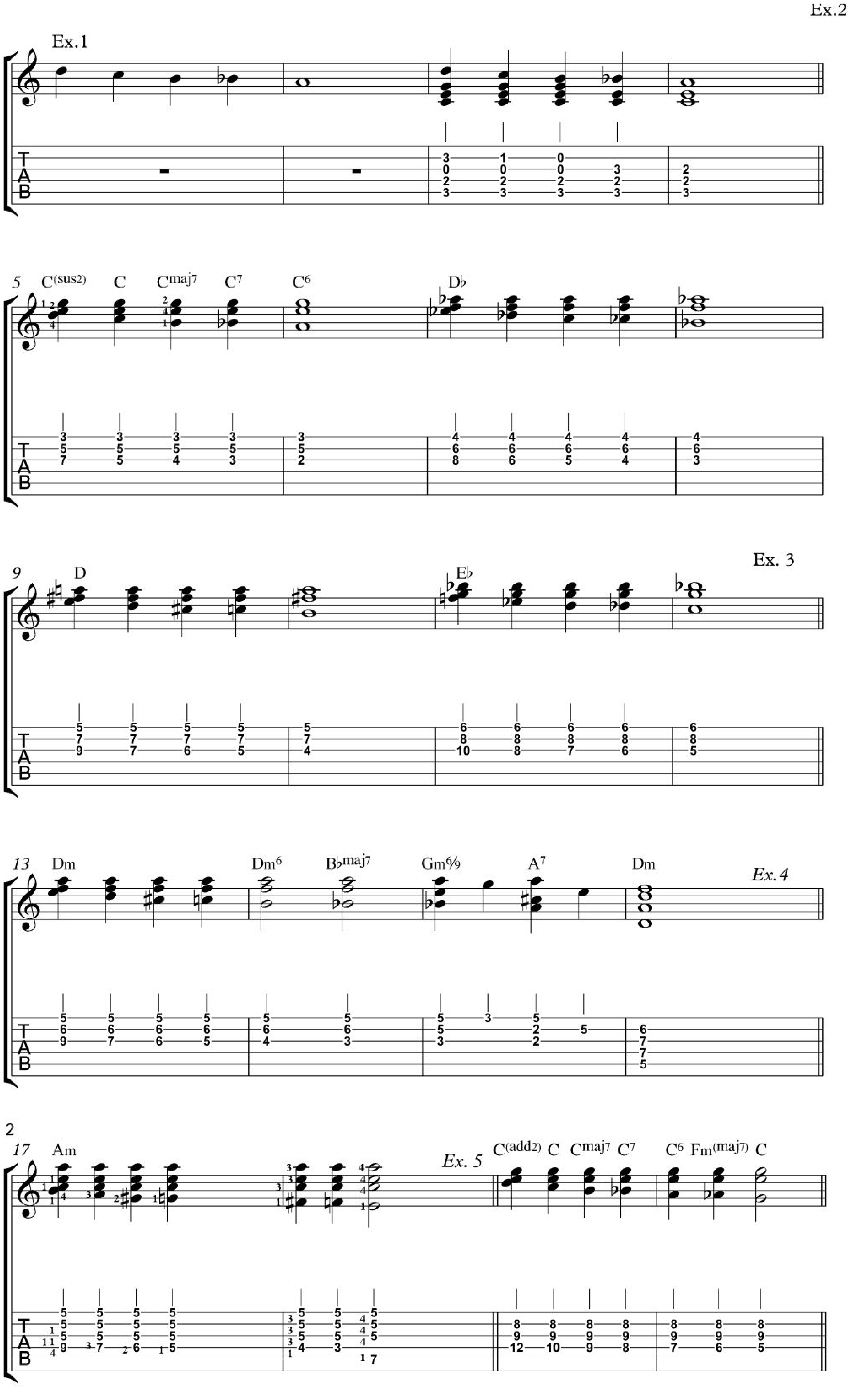
"The skills needed here can be applied to a variety of styles"

EXAMPLE 2

To my ear, this sounds more elegant and you also have the attractive 'crush' of D against E. There is a stretch of the fourth finger, but this becomes easier at higher positions where the distance between frets reduces.

There are no open strings to consider; the whole movement can be shifted up the fingerboard to each key. I've notated the semitone upward shift to Db, D and Eb as an example.

BUILDING CHORD SOLOS



EXAMPLE 3

This is in a minor mode, using the same principle to move from Dm through to Gm6, A7 back to Dm. Again, I suggest that you move this up and down the fingerboard to other keys and positions while retaining the same fingering; e.g. this starts at the fifth position (fret 5); if you move it to eighth position you will have Fm-Bbm6-C7-Fm.

EXAMPLE 4

Now we'll apply the same procedure to an Am chord at fret 5. If you wanted to name each chord, it's Am sus2, Am, Am ma7, Am7, Am 6 (F#m7-5) , F maj 7, Am. Take note of the left hand fingering, play slowly and, as before, shift to different positions on the fretboard. You'll find that the initial fourth finger stretch is not so difficult here.

EXAMPLE 5

Now the last form for this lesson on a major chord; you will find the hand extension quite challenging if you are not used to such stretches, so I have notated the exercise higher up the neck where the frets are closer together and the stretch is easier. Once you are comfortable, move to a lower fret and try the same pattern, then once that is easier, move lower again. This is a good stretching exercise for that lazy 'pinkie' (4th finger).

EXAMPLE 6

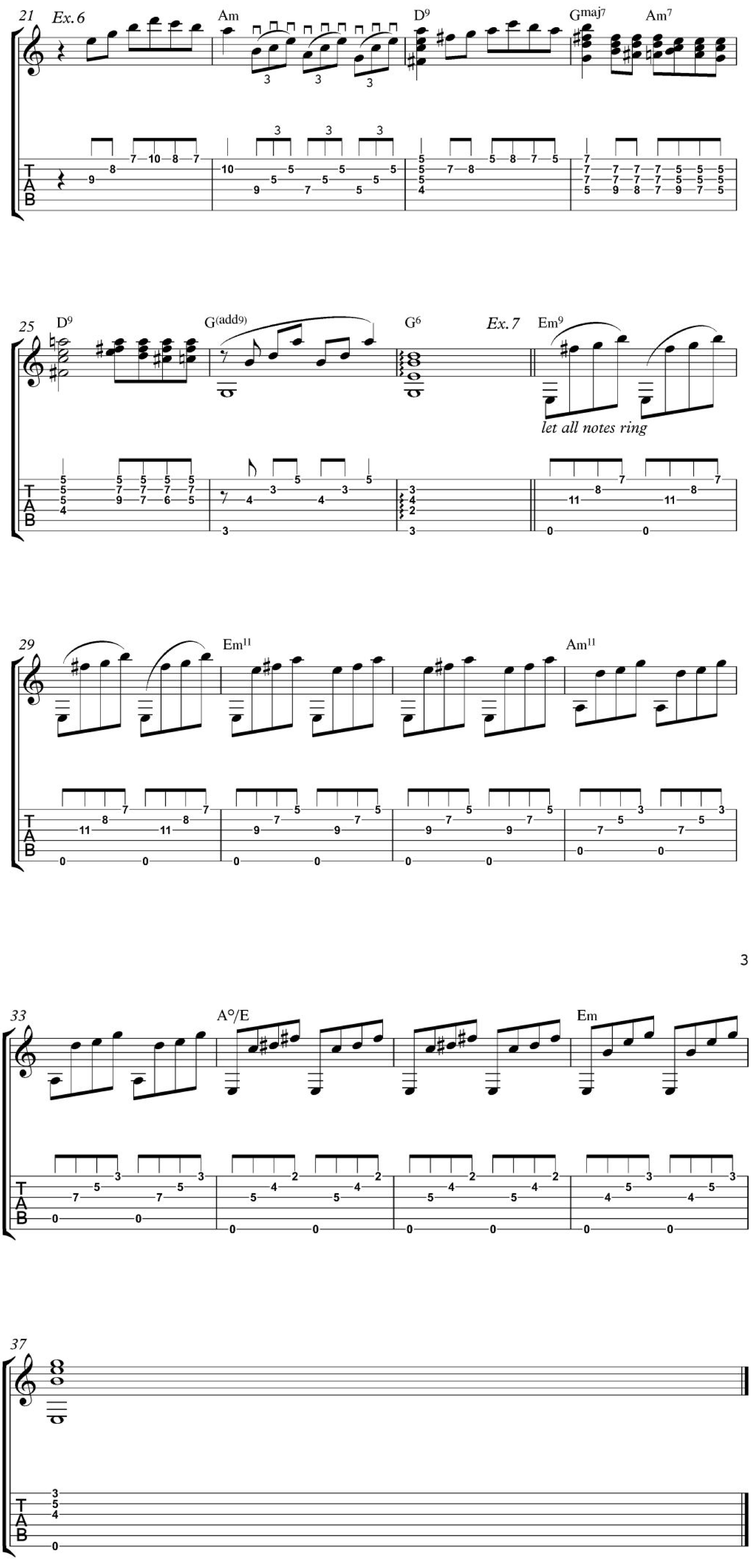
Here we are applying the moves rehearsed above into a typical jazz standard style, where there is a melodic phrase (bar 21) followed by the descending passing tone, but played as triplet arpeggios in bar 22, and so on. It's worth noting that the triplets can be played with a sweep picking style – that is, downstrokes for each group – allowing all the notes to ring as they are on different strings.

EXAMPLE 7

Finally we apply the same technique to a conventional folk/classical style, moving the chord form of a pedal note E in bar 28, changing to A in 32 and back to E at 34.

I hope you enjoy getting to grips with this style. For inspiration, I'd particularly recommend looking for live performances on from the masters of jazz chord soloing, such as Mundell Lowe and Barney Kessel.

Feel free to contact me for advice and tuition on chrisgibbonsmusic@icloud.com



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MINOR 7TH ARPEGGIOS

Carl explores 7th chord arpeggios

This month's column continues on from my previous column last May, exploring seventh chord arpeggios, an indispensable tool for any guitarist who wants to be able to improvise through chord changes.

EXAMPLE 1

Here we have four different arpeggio positions for the Cminor7th chord.

The Cminor7th chord contains four notes:

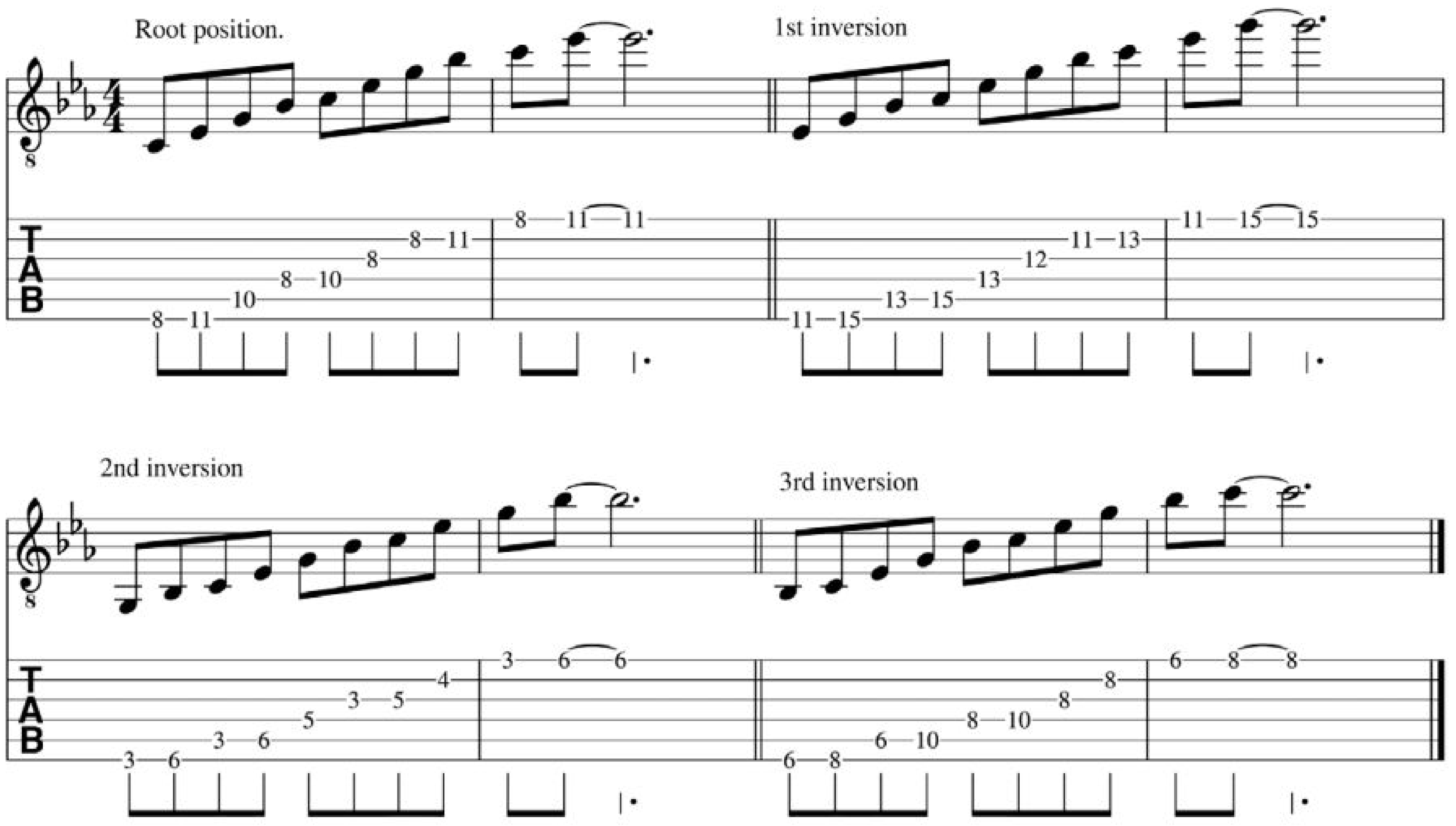
C – the first degree, otherwise known as the root or the tonic
Eb – the minor 3rd
G – the 5th and
Bb – the flat 7th

I have notated an arpeggio position beginning on each note of the Cminor7th chord. The first position begins on the first degree of the chord and is called root position. The next position starts on the minor 3rd of the chord and this is called the first inversion. The following position starts on the 5th of the chord and is called the second inversion. The last position starts on the minor 7th and is called the third inversion.

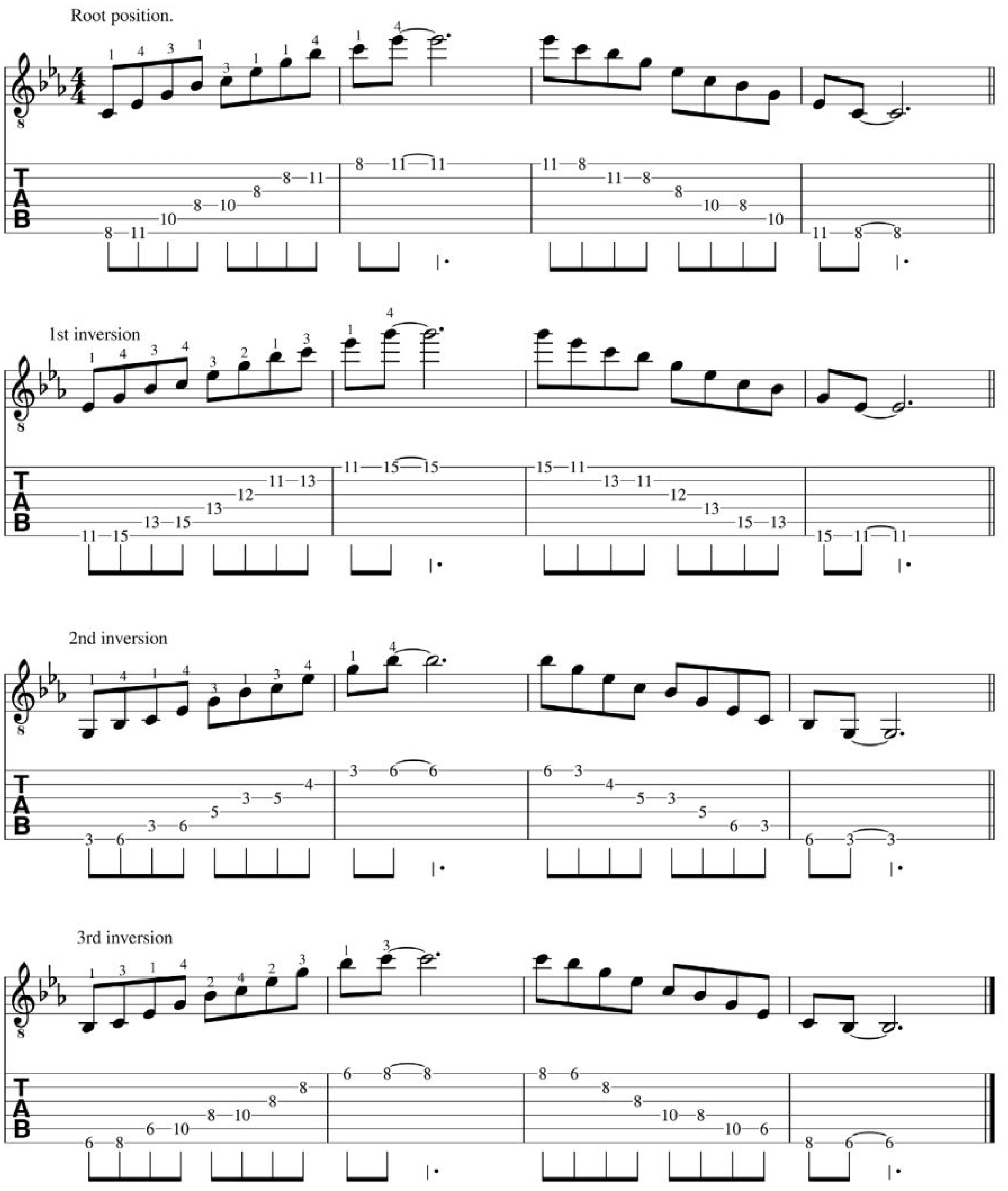
EXAMPLE 2

Play each arpeggio position as written – start slowly and gradually increase your speed. Once you can play them fluently try transposing them to different keys. I know this kind of practising can be boring and it's very easy to drift off – before you know it you've got your phone out and you're looking at videos of dogs on surfboards! However, while this is totally normal and forgivable, it won't actually improve your guitar playing (damn!).

EXAMPLE 1



EXAMPLE 2



Nonetheless, I have found that a good way to steer clear of dogs on surfboards while practising is to use a timer. To begin with, I set the timer for a short duration of two or three minutes then, as I get more warmed up and start to enjoy the flow of my practise, I increase the duration to five minutes. I rarely go beyond five minutes as I get bored and, well, you know what happens when I get bored, what with the dogs on surfboards and everything!

As with all technical practice, it's important to play these exercises 'perfectly'. Obviously nobody's perfect, but we can achieve a decent approximation of perfection by playing the exercises over and over at a tempo at which we can play them cleanly.

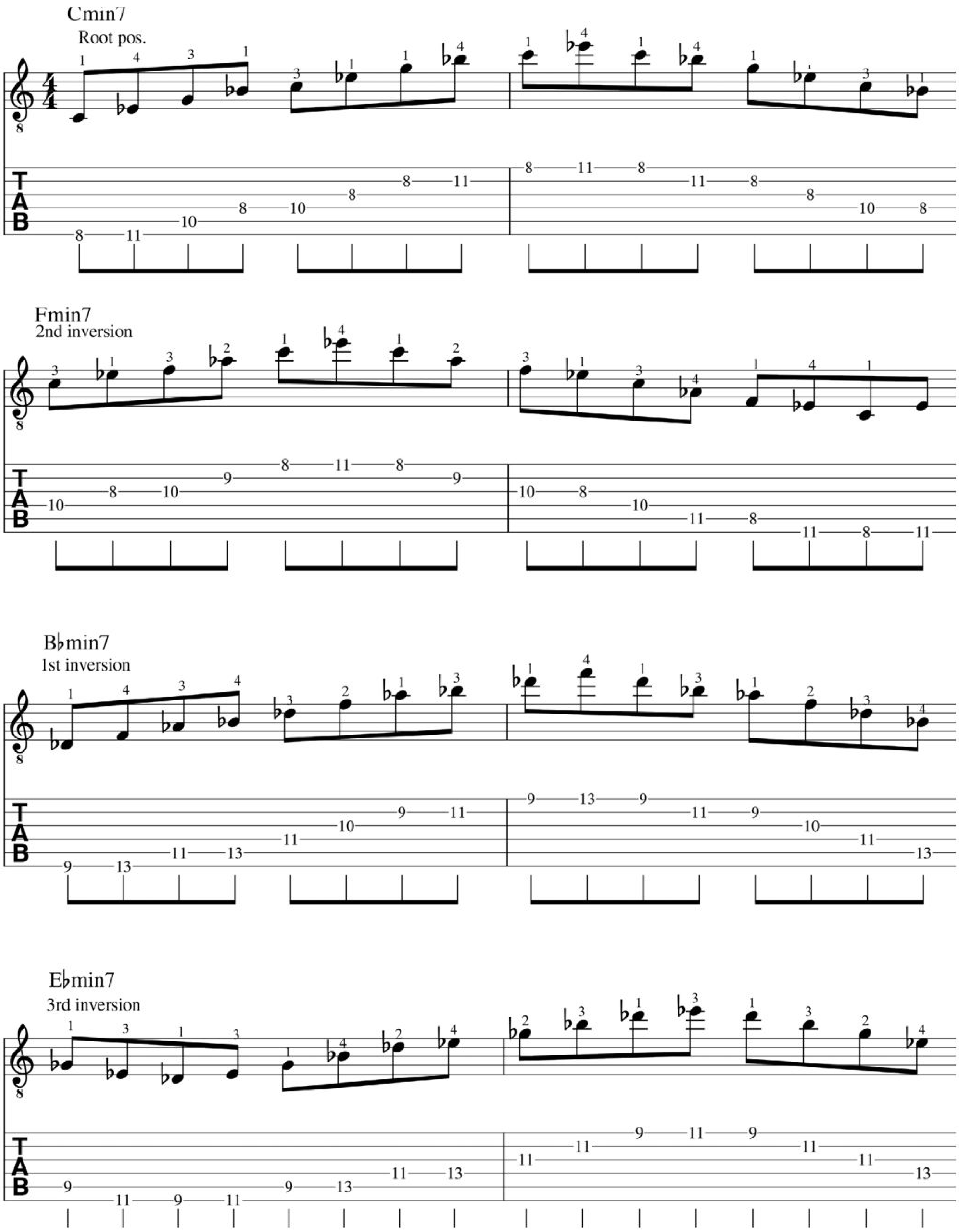
Don't worry too much about increasing the speed – it's more important to play the arpeggios cleanly than to play them fast. There is a maxim in music 'Slow is fast' – in other words, if you want to play something quickly, play it slowly and accurately and this will create a solid basis for playing it at a higher speed. If you're in a rush and play the arpeggio exercises at a speed which is too fast for you to play them cleanly, sounding sloppy and inconsistent, this merely reinforces the sloppiness and yields very poor results, and will actually prevent you from playing them at speed.

EXAMPLE 3

This exercise is 16 bars long and contains eight arpeggios, two of each inversion:

Root position in bars 1-2 and 9-10
1st inversion in bars 5-6 and 15-16
2nd inversion in bars 3-4 and 13-14 and
3rd inversion in bars 7-8 and 11-12.

EXAMPLE 3



There's no particular logic to the chord movement – I just started with the root position Cminor7th arpeggio and after two bars moved randomly to an arpeggio inversion within easy reach (Fminor7th) and continued this approach throughout. This exercise navigates through seven of the 12 keys so it's a great way to practise moving through different tonalities. As previously, I suggest you record a backing track to play along with. ■

RICHARD GILEWITZ FINGERSTYLE GUITARIST

'LITTLE ALEX'

Musician and educator Gilewitz shares a cheery little 16th-heavy number, inspired by a four-legged friend

This 12-bar creation appeared one afternoon while I noodled aimlessly, trying to establish a bouncy rhythm with just a handful of chords. I'd like to take you through the evolution and journey of this tune from its inception to its note treatment for decoration.

The rhythm of the beats within each bar consists of either a quarter note, pair of eighth notes, grouping of 16th notes or what I like to call the broken 16th notes, which in this case was exclusively a single eighth note paired with two 16th notes, thus giving the tune the bounce I had predetermined as a goal.

LOOSE CONNECTIONS

Sometimes these rhythms occur as a reaction to just playing around without much thought. But in this very loose endeavour – which was to pick a few chords in a key, mix up the contents rhythmically of each individual beat, and then, with only this group, end up with a tune.

For me the most fun was the movements or "placements" of these beats where I sometimes placed the grouping of 16th notes on beat 3, or beat 1, or simply left them out of a few bars. The broken 16th beat wound up on beat 1 in a few cases and occurred on beat 3 only once during one of the bars. This part was not actually predetermined but showed up as I plunked around with my four little rhythmic ingredients.

I wanted to keep the tune short or little, the word that stuck in my brain. When a title flies in from out of nowhere, unlike when I arrange a piece with slow concentration and depth, I don't question it. My previous titles do or don't relate to the tune. I wrote a piece for the Blue Penguin of Oamaru, New Zealand, called 'Have You Ever Seen a Rainbow at Night?'. Where's the connection? There really isn't one.

I am a dog person. Once, while touring, I watched a little black furry dog scamper about like a tiny ninja creature – silent, seemingly expressionless, yet exhibiting more personality in its own unique world than I had seen in other dogs. I cracked up when I saw the dog running full speed on a tile floor, suddenly hit carpet, and continue traveling with more of an airplane landing drag to a total stop. I asked the owner, "What's the name?" She responded, "Oh, that's Little Alex!" I knew then Little Alex needed to be borne into music.

Let's examine 'Little Alex' a bit. I'll try to recall some semblance of the process as it occurred. The first thing was to choose a batch of chords. I went with the key of G with the plan of only using the following chords. G, D, Am and Em. For no apparent reason, I completely left out the C chord. Not a clue how it slipped by since it is the IV chord in the key of G.

I used the D7 as a chord in the shape of a C7 chord, just up two frets in the first three bars, which launches the theme right out of the gate. After time, you will feel how it plays off of the initial G chord and uses strings 2 and 3 as a sort of musical 'thread' as it navigates back and forth between the two chords. Additionally, I also decided to turn the V chord into a D7 inversion, which is very common to avoid string 1 in bars 6 and 8 which moves the F# on string 1 fret 2 to string 6, fret 2. This allowed for a more resonant tone in the bass end and left a little room for a melody player, whether it's another instrument or voice. The Am and Em are the ii and vi chords in the Key of G. For those not familiar with music and chording, it is common to use the lowercase letters to indicate minor chords.

TIME IT RIGHT

Here's the most important aspect at this point. In order to establish the rhythm and bounce of the tune, write in the timing and then speak *and* clap it out prior to any attempt at fingerpicking. Many players simply launch into playing without giving a thought to the intended rhythm. The chance of guessing it right when dealing with broken rhythms is negative zero!

Here's a method I use. Take a look at a grouping of four 16th notes. They're often counted in this fashion: 1 e and a. This would be the equivalent of a single quarter note. So, if you had two quarter notes, this grouping of 16ths, and then another quarter note that bar would be counted as: 1, 2, 3e&a, 4. Clap that out against a slow click setting on the metronome, perhaps around 72 bpm. Feel free to adjust the setting up or down as long as you keep it relaxed on the 16th notes and not rushed.

Another trick to establish the proper timing for the broken 16th is if there's an eighth note followed by two 16th notes, I know an eighth note is worth the value of two 16th notes so I would count 1, 2, 3 (miss) & a, 4. With 'Little Alex', I selected beat one to establish that bounce which sets the tune in motion. Clap out the timing of each bar very slowly. To minimise any complexities, initially split each bar in half. Everyone progresses at a different pace. Take your time.

Bars 1-8 are really the crux of the tune and bars 9-12 are really just what might be next. It was my first effort to move the Am to a new location, again avoid string 1 while focusing on the bass region. Notice on a couple of occasions, striking the same string three times in a row with a thumb, index, thumb action (p i p) gives a bit of scurrying along feeling and the follow-up note is like Little Alex suddenly hitting a tuff of carpet!

As far as the actual picking patterns, my brain had nothing to do with them. My hands did. When not paying attention, they seemed to fall into an alternating bass style. The preferred left and right hand fingerings are notated throughout for assistance. My ears told me to use a capo at fret 6 (VI) but, then my mind told me that other players would have to play in the key of C# if they wanted to join in, so my sympathy went for fret 7 (VII). Remember to go sooooo slowly in the development of the tune that you'll hear snails yelling for you to hurry it up. Ignore them. Especially if you think they are really talking to you. ■

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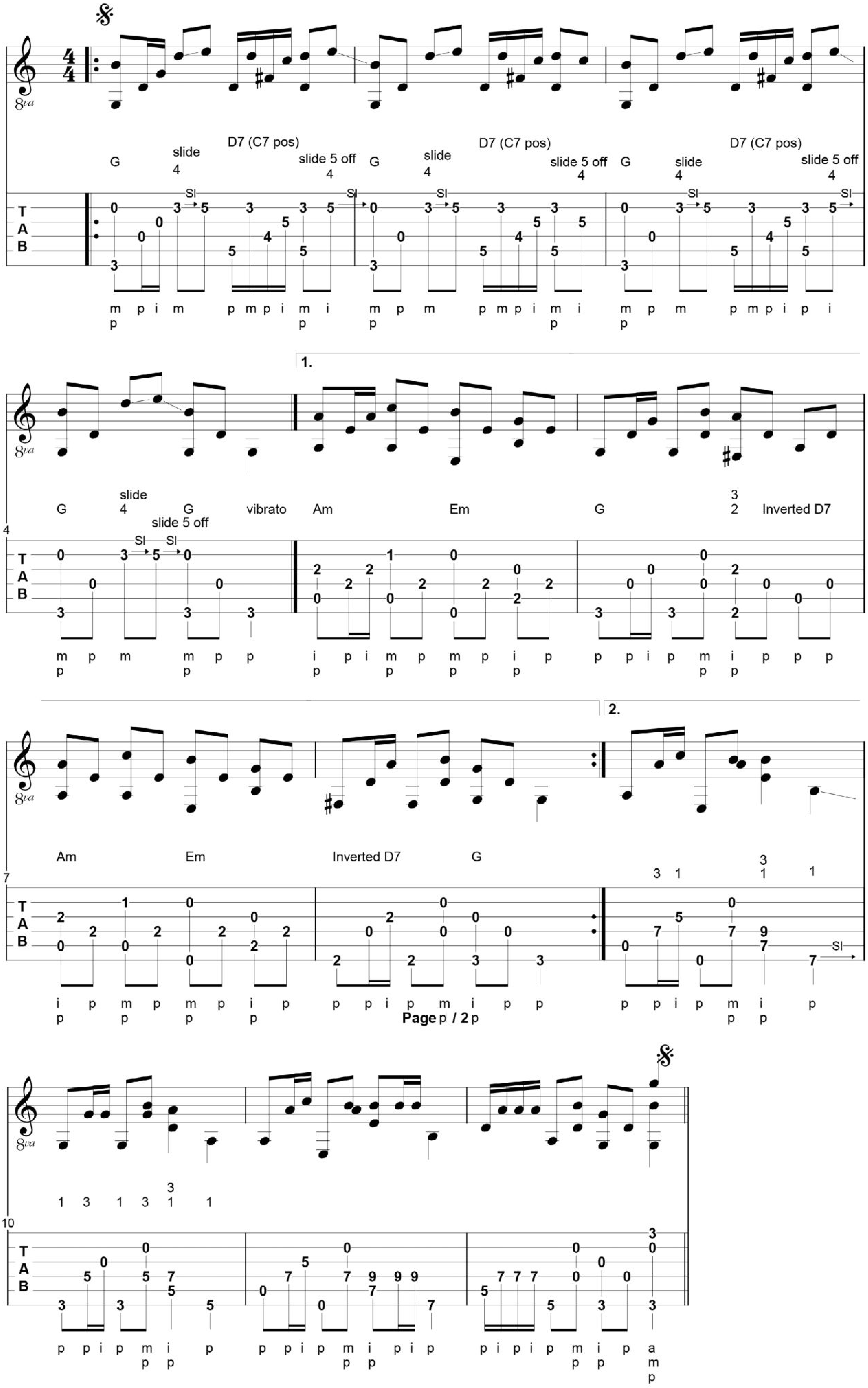
'LITTLE ALEX'



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SIMON MAYOR UK MANDOLIN MAESTRO

'LARK IN THE CLEAR AIR'

Simon shows us a not-as-hard-as-it-appears Irish air

I would have been very, very young when I first heard this lovely old Irish melody, and it lodged itself firmly in my brain.

It was in distant days in a far off land when the BBC (only one TV channel then) had a folk music programme on at about 7pm, just before my bedtime, and an Irish singer with a high, sweet voice called Paddie Bell made regular appearances. Her recording is now on YouTube along with many more versions if you want to hear it sung.

Although I feel obliged to give an 'advanced' tag to this chordal arrangement, I hope it won't scare you from having a go, even if you don't think of yourself as a Paganini of the mandolin yet. There are a couple of reasons for this: it's a slow air, and you can take it as slowly and freely as you want. If your fingers need an extra couple of seconds to get through a particular passage, don't worry about it. Think of it as heavy rubato rather than a pause; turn a necessity into a virtue and milk the moment! Secondly, you always have the option of leaving out some of the harmony notes if they're just too difficult in a particular place; if you play only the notes with up stems you'll have the pure melody, and it's really rather simple. In fact, whatever your skill level, you may find it good to do this at first to get acquainted with the tune, but I hope you'll have in your sights the full arrangement. My recording, available on the website, should help.

"Never assume large hands are a drawback to playing a small instrument"

© Getty Images

Some points to mention about the notation. A dot above or below the stem of a note indicates it should be played staccato (short, without sustain). I've used this on the very first chord and similarly in bars 4 and 12. In fact, I was making a virtue out of a necessity here, because the following F# was hard to reach on either the first or second string. If I made a feature out of a staccato first chord I had an extra split second to reach the F#. Call it the pragmatic approach to arranging for mandolin!

The vertical, square-cornered brackets you'll find in bars 1, 3, 4, 7 and elsewhere indicate a partial barré, usually across just two strings. Barrés are usually done with the first finger, but occasionally it's useful to do them with the second or even third. You can either rock the joint of the finger back to flatten out the pad, or, if your fingers are large enough, you may be able to press two strings down with the tip. Incidentally, never assume large hands are a drawback to playing a small instrument like the mandolin; a couple of the finest players I've ever seen have very large hands.

A tricky moment in the middle of bar 2: you'll hear an Asus4 chord with the notes D, E and A immediately resolving to a straight A major chord. The fourth finger, playing the D on the bottom string, slides down a fret to the C#. There's no need to play the C# with the plectrum; the residual energy in the string should be enough to make it sound. This is hard, in part because you're executing it with your weakest finger but also because you have to hold down the E with your index and make sure nothing is impeding the vibration of the open A string. The result is worth the effort, though.

In the penultimate bar, rather than playing the F# on the top string, reach up with your fourth finger to fret 9 on the A string and allow yourself a hint of a downwards glissando.

Otherwise, it's a case of following the fingering. When you feel you're familiar with all the twists and turns of the left hand, concentrate on your delivery; remember it's a song, so play it as a singer would sing it – with lots of expression, and, despite my staccato moments mentioned above, with a legato (smooth) feel. ■

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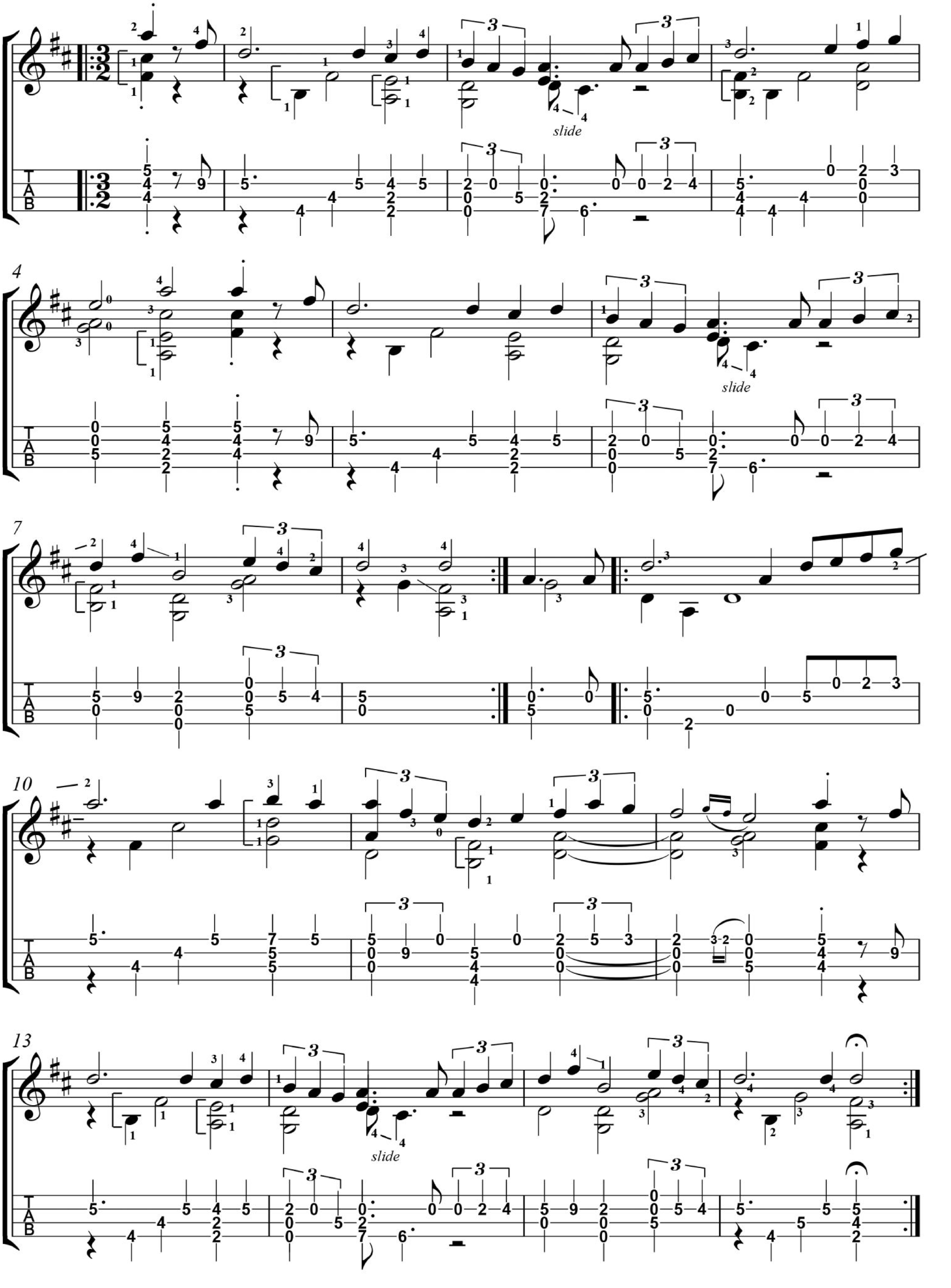
'LARK IN THE CLEAR AIR'



MIKE DAWES FINGERSTYLE VIRTUOSO

SLAP ATTACK

FULL TAB ONLINE

And now for something different! A bed-bound Mike relives his TV debut

Greetings guitar fans, Mike here coming almost live from a sick bed in Los Angeles. That said, all is grand and the mood is somewhat fiery. For this month's column, I'll be channelling my post-NAMM show rage into a guitar battle for you to learn, share with a friend and have a lot of fun with. That's right, it's a guitar battle, and not quite 'duelling banjos'...

Back in 2013 I wrote this little nugget for a TV campaign based around the idea of taking that classic Steve-Vai-in-*Crossroads* imagery but composing it on acoustic guitar, and channeling my own modern fingerstyle heroes as influencers. The piece was dubbed 'Slap Attack' and features two players dubbed 'Ben' and 'Earl'. Ben was played by the rather talented US prodigy Ben Lapps, while Earl was a CGI pensioner version of myself. Look mum, I'm sort of on the telly.

EXAMPLE 1

'Ben' begins the battle using slap guitar techniques in the key of D minor. The tuning for the whole piece is DADGAD, a tuning favoured by myself and contemporaries dating back to Davey Graham. The muted and popped notes are commonplace in slap bass patterns taking influence from Christophe Godin and Justin King, bringing out the octave, 6th and minor 7th among others. Note the hammered triplet run leading to a slapped harmonic chord. The blues element is added by subtly bending the minor 3rd to create tension at the end of the extract.

EXAMPLE 2

'Earl' continues by creating a response higher up the neck in D minor pentatonic box patterns. This concludes with a tasty blues run leading into a slapped F5 chord in the bass.

EXAMPLE 3

Now here is where things get a little 'Dawes/Sariola' with the funky bass pattern from my song 'Overload', as we underlay percussion elements in the form of a 'bass drum' (heel of hand) and 'snare drum' (palm of hand on fingerboard). This is followed by a Rodrigo y Gabriela-esque rasgueado pattern in the picking hand, quickly chopping the strings to create a glorious rhythmic flurry. 'Earl' inverts the fretting hand to pay homage to Preston Reed, one of the great acoustic guitar pioneers. Note the change in tempo as the intensity of the piece increases.

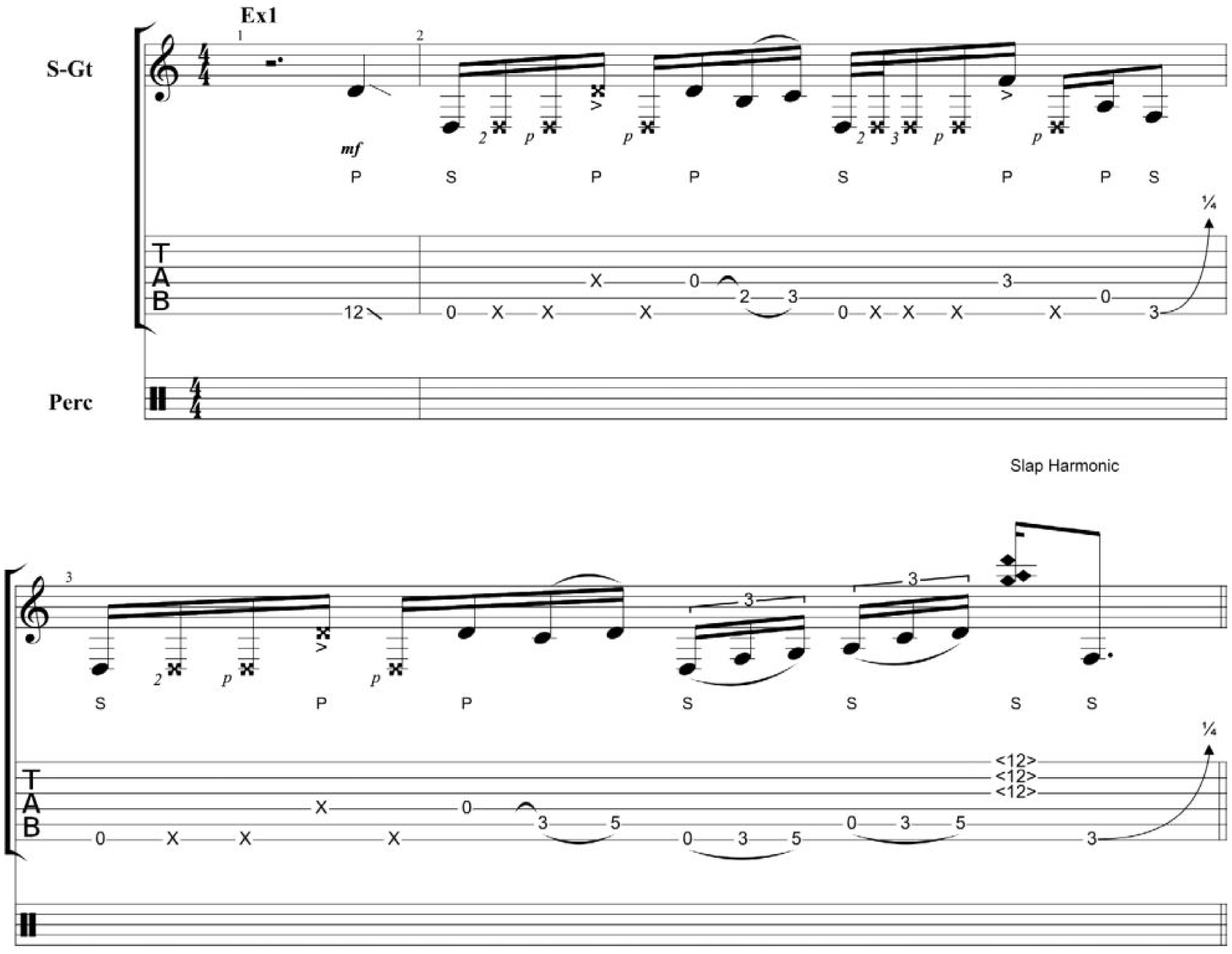
EXAMPLE 4

During this round as the guitar battle approaches it's climax, both players are experimenting with hammer-ons and percussion before half a bar each of pure percussion. The instruction here is clear on the tab but for extra detail there is a demonstration of Ben and I performing this on YouTube. It is also worth saying that almost *any* percussive element can be improvised, I am not trying to keep you in a *cough* box *cough*.

EXAMPLE 5

Finally, the two players can come together, in glorious, shreddy minor harmony. Both Ben and Earl's parts above are designed to be played together. Ben is making use of vertical two-handed tapping techniques (similar to those we have covered in numerous issues) while Earl finds a guitar pick after channelling his inner Van Halen. I sincerely hope you have fun learning this and playing it with your friends. As mentioned, the original can be found online as well as countless wonderful tunes by the aforementioned artists. ■

EXAMPLE 1



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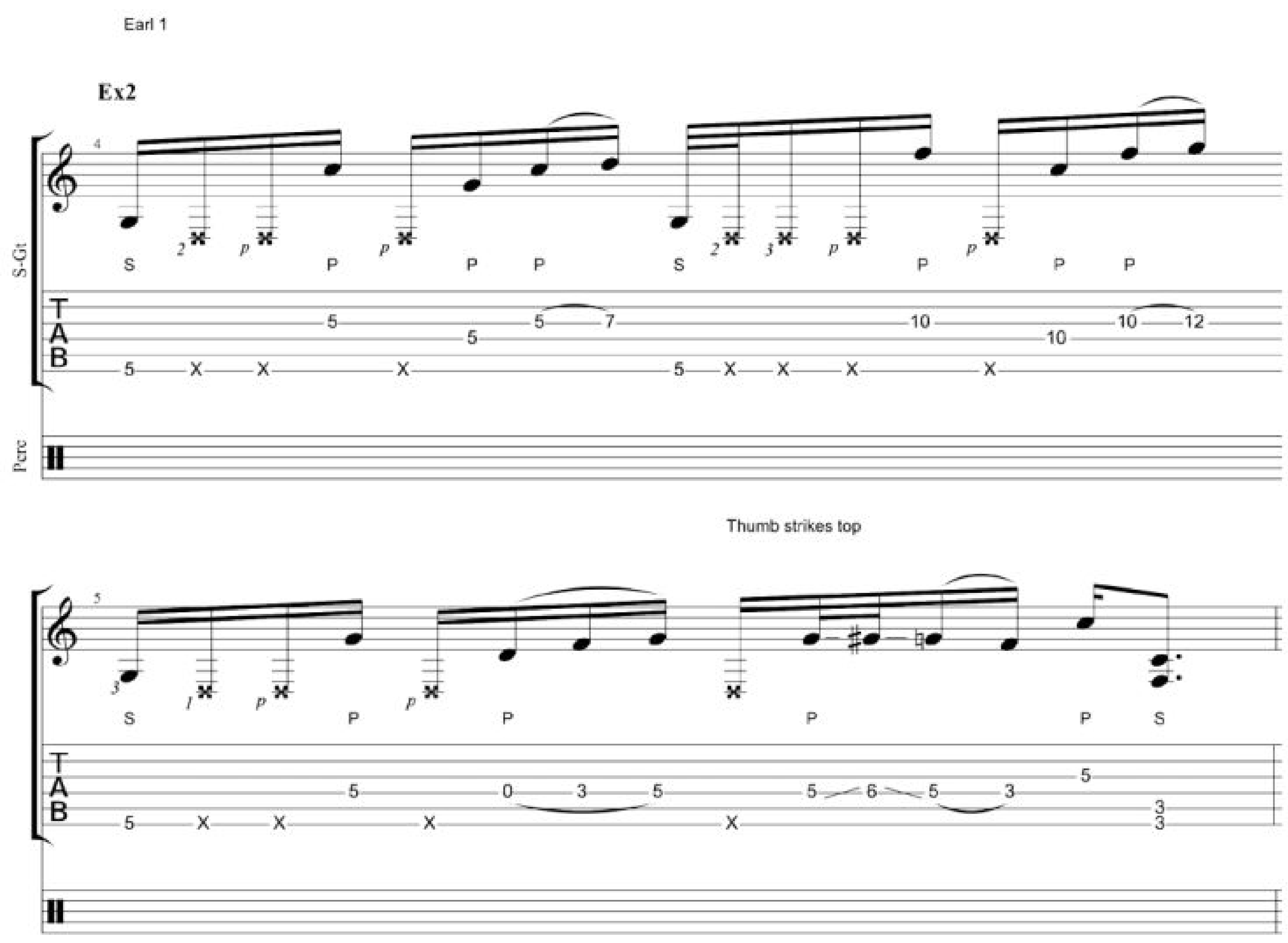
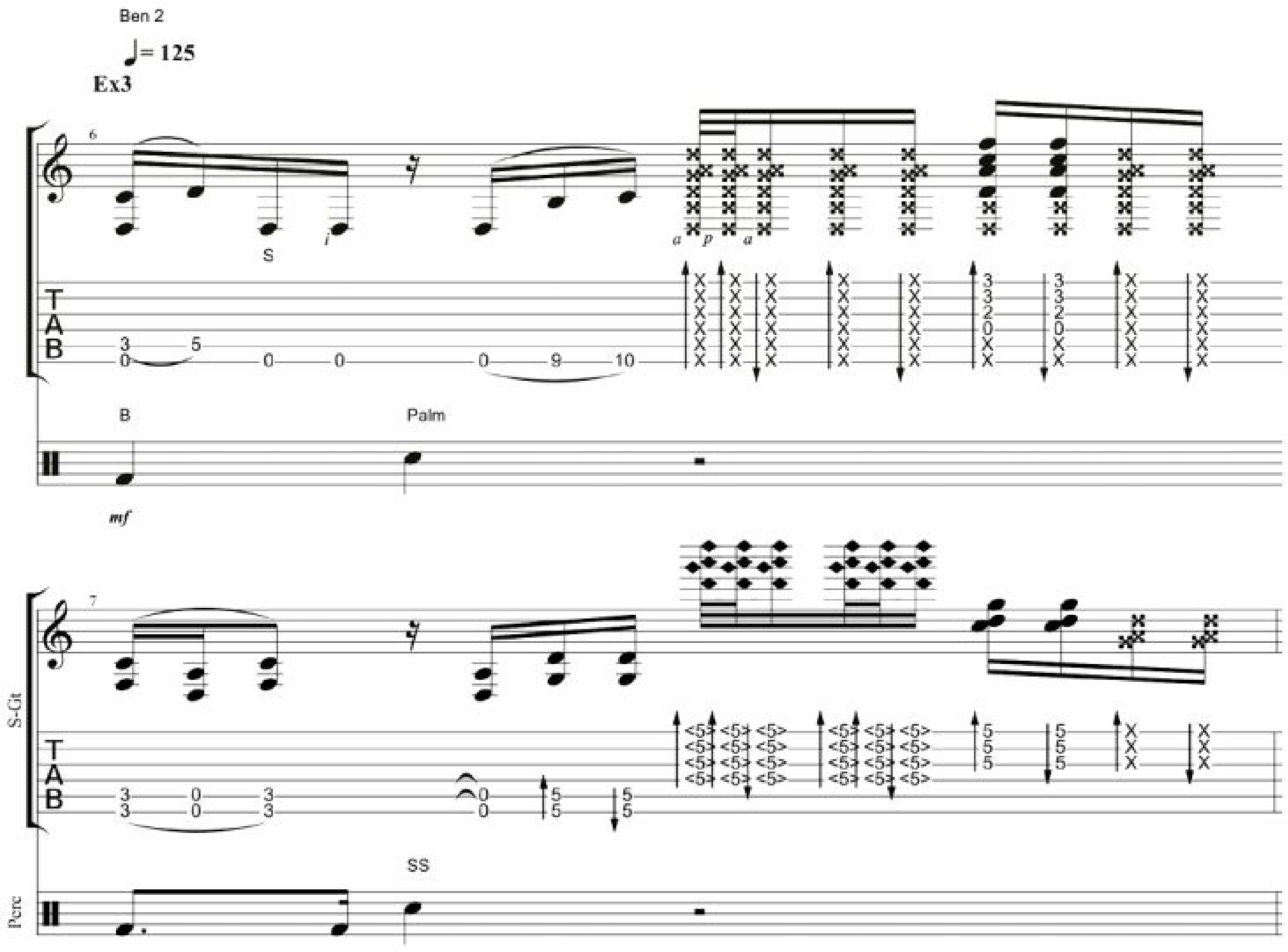
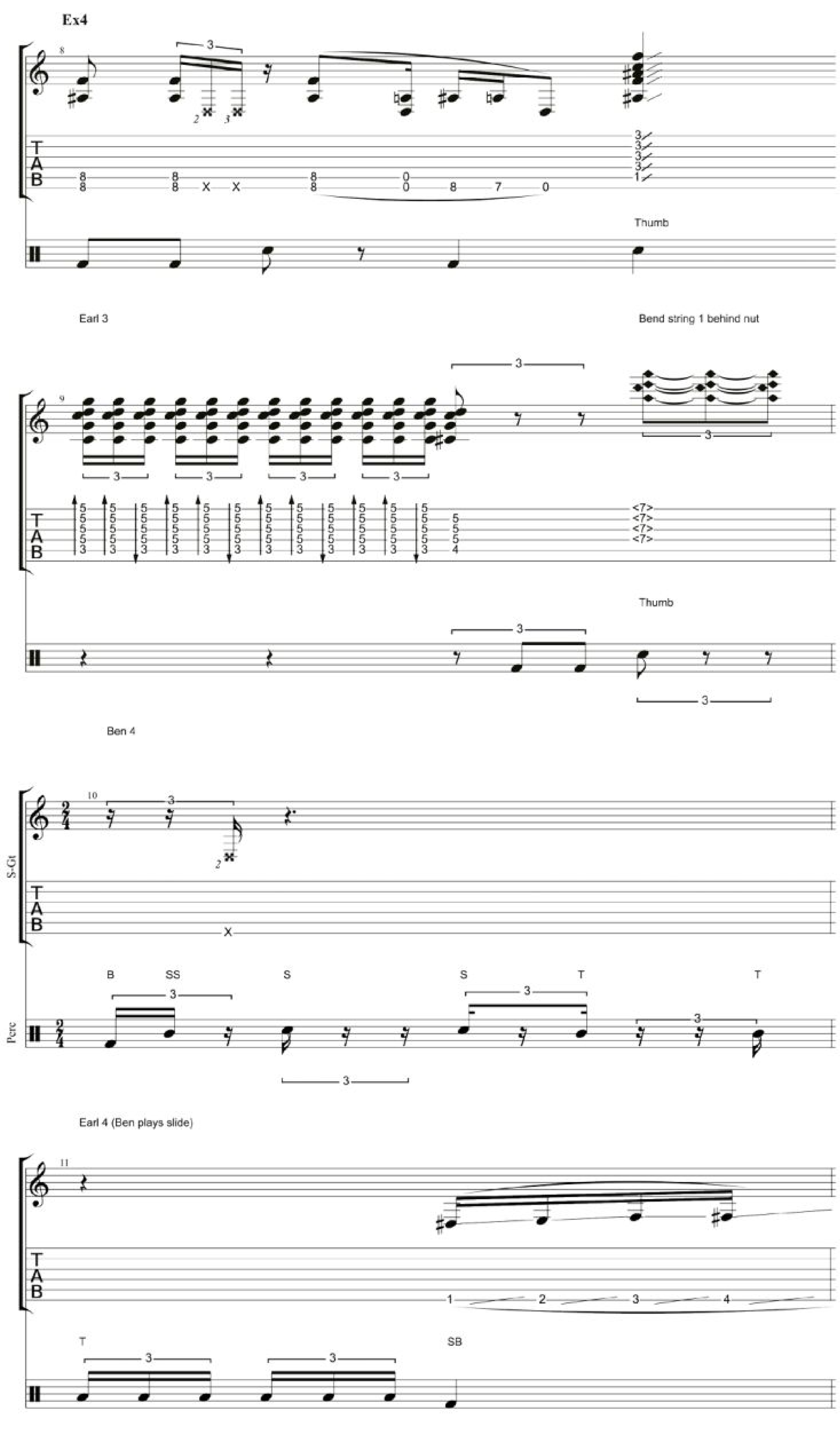


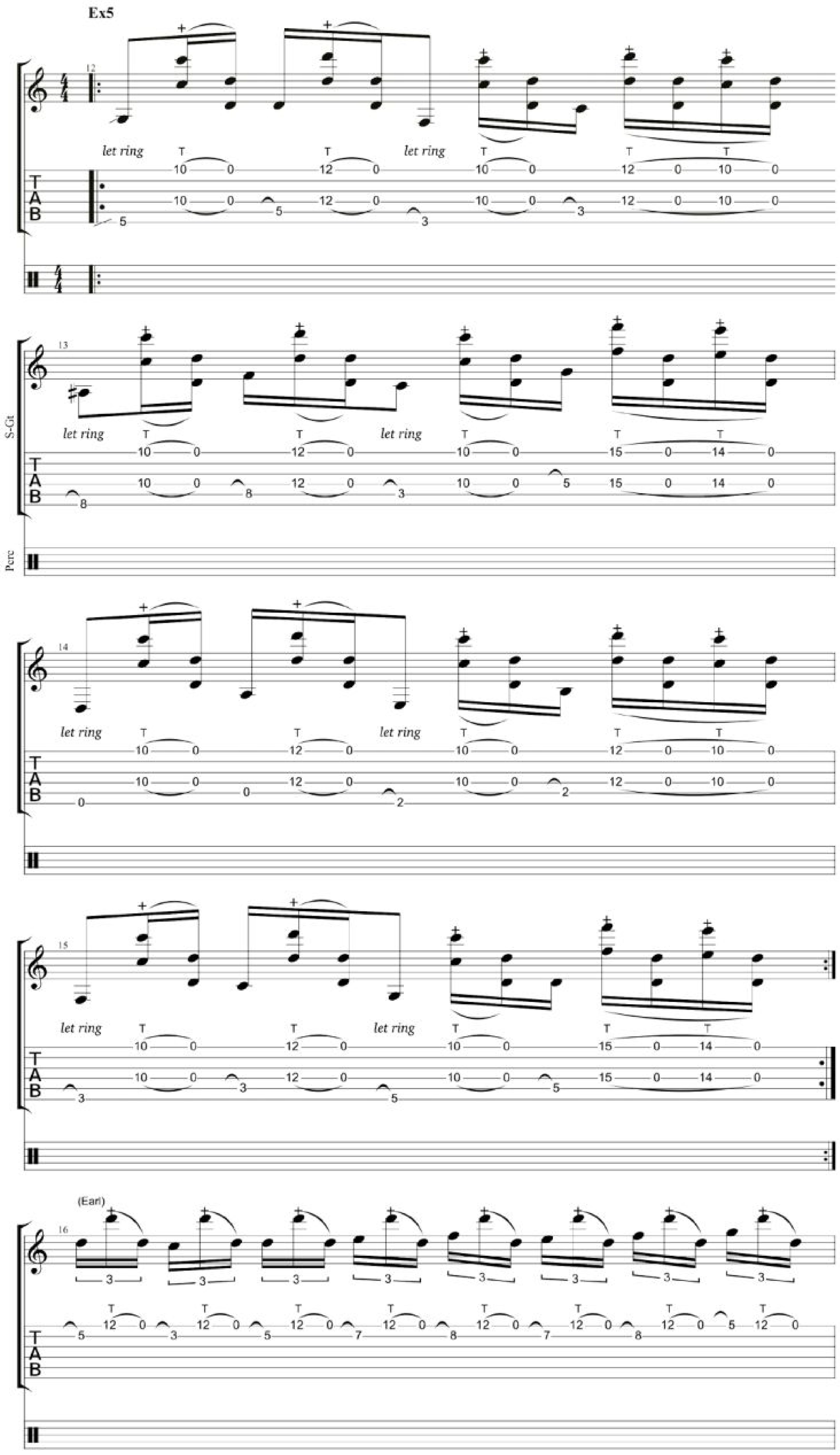
EXAMPLE 3



EXAMPLE 4



EXAMPLE 5



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RAYMOND BURLEY CLASSICAL GUITARIST

'PRELUDIO NO.5'

Raymond Burley presents a gentle piece by Francisco Tárrega

This time I've chosen a piece by the Spanish guitarist Francisco Tárrega. Francisco de Asís Tárrega y Eixea (1852-1909) has a pivotal role in classical guitar history. He was a teacher, a prolific composer and also made a number of arrangements for the instrument by composers such as Bach, Haydn, Mendelssohn and Beethoven. While the arrangements are effective these days they might be considered perhaps a little too indulgent; they often contain effects such as portamento (slides), harmonics and etouffé (pizzicato) that some may feel to be anachronistic in, for example, a Chopin piano piece. As far as the original compositions are concerned, my personal opinion is that Tárrega is at his best when writing miniatures such as 'Lágrima', 'Maria' and the slightly longer 'Capricho Arabe'; however, there is little doubt that his most popular and well-known piece is the tremolo study 'Recuerdos de la Alhambra'.

Tárrega wrote a number of free-standing preludes, although it remains unclear as to exactly how many. Some publications list 15 pieces, a friend of mine David Russell has recorded a set of 16, other editors cite as many as 30. The problem arises as not all the potential pieces include the word 'Preludio' in the title and as a prelude has no specific form other pieces could easily qualify for the title.

As you'll see, 'Preludio no.5' is a gentle piece in E major with a dotted rhythm throughout. With some accents added to the second beats of the bar it could almost be considered to be a leisurely mazurka. Andante sostenuto translates as 'moderate' (or 'walking') and 'sustained'. I suggest a tempo of around crotchet = 50 but it must never be metronomic in performance. Technical points to observe are as follows: in the opening bar be careful not to damp the open sixth string accidentally when placing the barré finger on the second beat chord – the pedal E bass must sustain. Even though an accent is shown here (and elsewhere) it should be very light and not create a break in the rising one-bar phrase. I suggest starting the piece quietly allowing the crescendo two bars later to be effective. Be careful not to misread the chords in the third and fourth bar: fingers 1 and 3 remain constant but the middle note is played by finger 2 and at other times 4. The slides in bars 6, 9, 10 and 14 must again be very light; bear in mind that they are no more than decorations to the melodic line. Those in bars 6 and 9 are particularly tricky simply because of the distances between the two notes.

The grace note is played by the right hand while the second note is sounded by the left hand finger alone sliding to the appropriate fret. Some players choose to omit these but clearly the composer wanted them to be played and they are very much part of the romantic style. The 'inverted turn' at the beginning of bar 16 can be performed in two ways: after playing the first note, slurring the remainder or alternatively slurring the second and third and playing the final note; the latter version will allow a more effective accent. At the very end of the piece Tárrega fingers the last two chords with the upper notes on string 2 and an open first string E – you may decide otherwise. The harmonic is performed by the right hand alone as the previous chord must not be released, this is executed with the outstretched i finger lightly touching the harmonic point (12th fret) and the a finger (or thumb) plucking the string.

As with many of Tárrega's pieces, 'Preludio no.5' is dedicated to his friend, pupil and patron Dr Walter Leckie. If this composer's music is of interest to you I strongly recommend obtaining Brian Whitehouse's wonderful book: *The Tárrega Leckie Manuscripts* (ASG Music, 2015). ■

"This piece must never be metronomic in performance"

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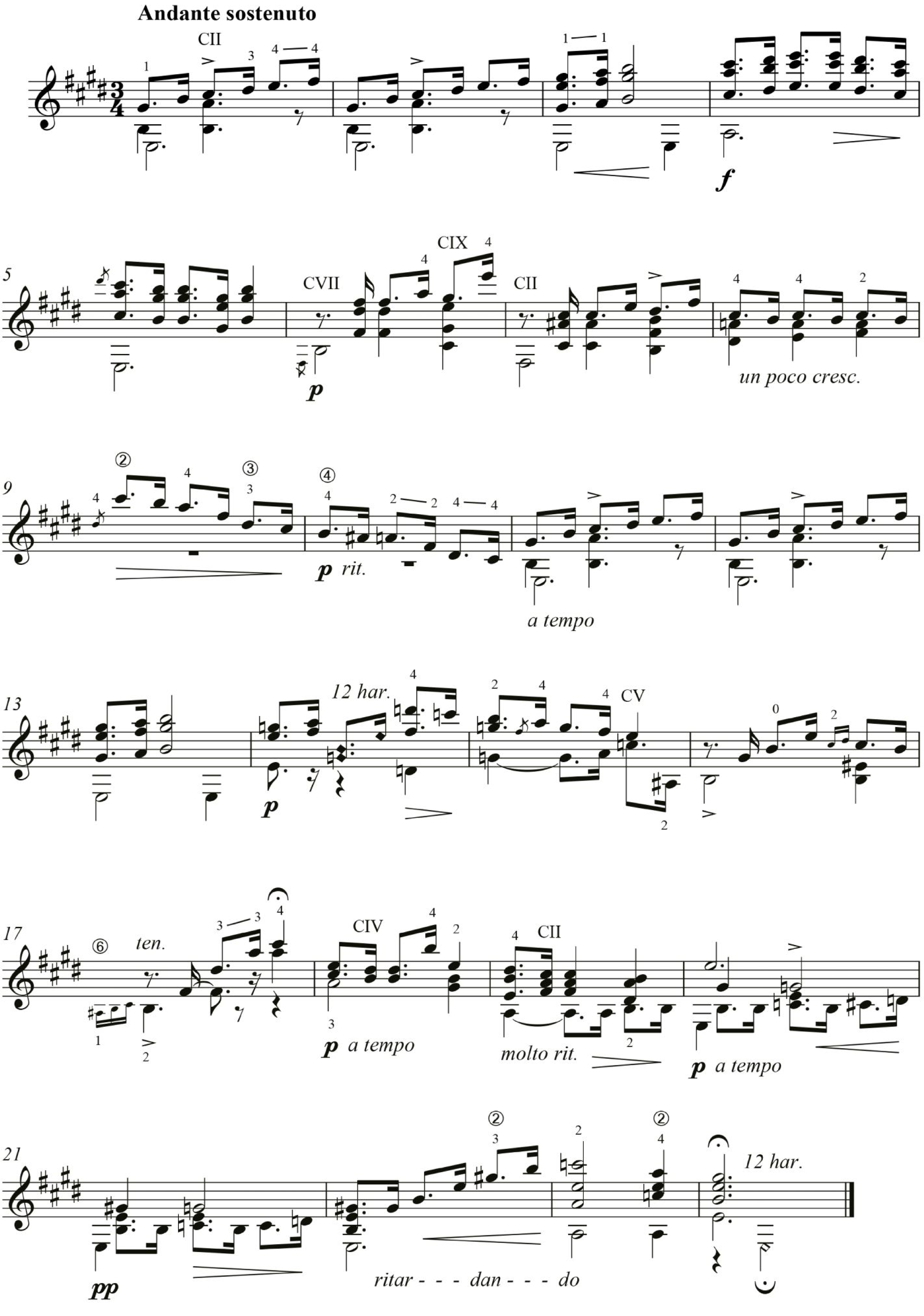
‘PRELUDIO NO.5’



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ON THIS MONTH IN 1969

As the 60s took a dark turn, Dylan made his most blissed-out album to date. With a smooth, smoke-free voice, Dylan made country cool and set charts alive doing so

On the lead up to Bob Dylan's ninth studio album, 1969's *Nashville Skyline*, the 60s were taking a turn for the worse. Following the assassinations of civil rights leader Martin Luther King Jr. and Senator Robert Kennedy, riots in the streets, and the escalation of the Vietnam War, there was more demand for protest songs than ever.

Amid all this chaos, however, a typically defiant Dylan returned with his most blissed-out album to date. After flirting with country music for a few years, Dylan fully embraced the influence of Hank Williams, Jerry Lee Lewis and Elvis Presley on *Nashville Skyline*. With a cocksure tip of the hat on the cover, Dylan seemed a million miles away from the problems of the decade.

While a minority of critics berated Dylan for turning his back on the movement when it needed him the most, the album generally earned a positive reaction from the press and was a rip-roaring success among fans – reaching No. 3 in the U.S. and earning Dylan his fourth UK No. 1 album. Along with more basic lyrical themes, simple songwriting structures and charming feel, it introduced fans to a whole new singing style too. Dylan claimed that quitting smoking was all it took to unlock the baritone croon he debuted on the LP: "I tell you, you stop smoking those cigarettes, and you'll be able to sing like Caruso," he said to *Rolling Stone* at the time. 'Lay Lady Lay', a ballad written for the film *Midnight Cowboy*, showcased his new voice, as well his smooth croon on the album's opener 'Girl From the North Country', a ballad with Jonny Cash.

Released in April 1969, *Nashville Skyline* found Dylan in a reflective space after 'going electric'. Following a motorcycle accident in upstate New York, not far from the future site of the Woodstock Festival in 1966, Dylan took the opportunity to reconnect with family life and his music became more personal.

After suggesting a country shift in direction with 1967's *John Wesley Harding*, Dylan went all out with *Nashville Skyline*, recruiting the best players the city could offer for the sessions. With Charlie McCoy on bass, Kenny Buttrey on drums, Charlie Daniels on guitar, and pedal steel master Pete Drake, Dylan succeeded in creating a colourful, full-band sound. Dylan told *Rolling Stone*, "I play it, and everyone else sort of fills in behind it."

In its own way, *Nashville Skyline* was a revolutionary album. In adopting a totally non-ironic approach to country music, Dylan kicked the down the door for the burgeoning Americana movement to follow.

Michael Gray wrote in the *Bob Dylan Encyclopedia*: "Country music was despised, hick music when Dylan took it up. People were divided into the hip and the non-hip."

Of course, Dylan didn't want to be the leader of the country music any more than he did the poster boy for the protest song movement at the beginning of the decade.

"Not only did I not want it, but I didn't need it," Dylan told the *Sunday Telegraph* in 2004. "I couldn't understand it either. None of us like to be defined by what other people think of us. I wasn't the toastmaster of any generation and that notion had to be pulled up by the roots."

Nashville Skyline produced three charting songs, the biggest being 'Lay Lady Lay', which matched Dylan's second-best-ever showing on the Billboard chart at No. 7.

Dylan had proved, once again, that doing his own thing and ignoring what was to be expected was the only way to approach his music and his life.

Whether he wanted it or not, Dylan was a powerful cultural force – and more relevant than ever. ■

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6 String Acoustics

15214 - Breedlove Discovery Concert
13552 - Eko Vintage Ranger 6 in Black, Reissue
13850 - Eko TRI 018 Honey Burst
15233 - Faith FKN Naked Neptune Acoustic Guitar
14718 - Faith FMSB45 BNC Classic Burst Mercury
16482 - Fender CC60S 3 Tone Sunburst
16871 - Fender CC60SCE LH Lefthanded, Natural
16870 - Fender CC60SCE, Black
16878 - Fender CD60S Acoustic Guitar
16483 - Fender CP60S Parlour Acoustic, Sunburst
16855 - Fender CT60S Acoustic Guitar Black
16860 - Fender CT60S Acoustic Guitar Natural
16476 - Fender FA115 Acoustic Guitar Pack
16877 - Fender FA125 Acoustic Guitar
16873 - Fender PM2E Deluxe Parlour Guitar, Nat
16727 - Fender PMTE Travel Guitar, All Mahogany
13386 - Landola D85 Dreadnought Acoustic, Used
16830 - Maestro Guitar Electro-Acoustic All Solid
16827 - Maestro Guitar Electro-Acoustic All Solid
16828 - Maestro Guitar Electro-Acoustic All Solid
13824 - Martin 00028EC Eric Clapton, Natural
13064 - Martin D18 Dreadnought, Secondhand
5702 - Martin D28 Dreadnought, Natural
6008 - Martin D35 Dreadnought, Natural
16874 - Martin M38 Acoustic Guitar, Secondhand
6007 - Martin OM21 Orchesta, Natural
6009 - Martin 00018 Grand Auditorium Acoustic Guitar
15258 - Rainsong NP12 Nylon Parlour Guitar, Used
11149 - Seagull Excursion Natural Folk SG
16585 - Stonebridge G23CR, Cutaway
15784 - Tanglewood Crossroads TWCR D Acoustic
13291 - Tanglewood TPEFLS
16866 - Tanglewood TW11 D Olive Wood D-nought
16865 - Tanglewood TW11 F Olive Wood Orchestra
15490 - Tanglewood TW40OD Sundance Delta Orch.
15491 - Tanglewood TW40PD Sundance Delta Parlour
15489 - Tanglewood TW40 SDD Sundance Delta
12668 - Tanglewood TW70 EG
15980 - Tanglewood Sundance Perf. Pro X15NS
13910 - The Cort AF510OP Acoustic Folk Guitar
8007 - Vintage V2000MGG Giltrap Mahog Acoustic
10950 - Vintage V880N Parlour Acoustic, Natural
10929 - Vintage VE2000DLX Gordon Giltrap
12437 - Yairi FY84 OM Folk Acoustic Guitar
16570 - Yairi GW1100 Acoustic Guitar, Secondhand
0000 - Yamaha - 5 Models in Stock Now

6 String Electro Acoustics

13718 - Maestro Victoria with fitted LR Baggs
15747 - Maestro Victoria WE 000 with LR Baggs
12225 - Martin & Co 000X1AE Electro Acoustic
15592 - Martin 0015E Retro Non-Cutaway Electro
16760 - Martin D28 (2017) Re-Imagined Version
8010 - Martin DRS1 All Mahogany Dreadnought
16139 - Martin Ed Sheeran 3 ÷ Signature Edition
13856 - Martin Ed Sheeran X Signature, Used
15591 - Martin GPC18E Electro Acoustic Guitar
15486 - Martin GPCPA4 Electro Acoustic Shaded
16116 - Martin GPCX1AE Electro Acoustic Guitar
16545 - Martin OM28 Standard Series
12438 - Northwood Custom Myrtle 80 Series D-nought
16787 - Ovation Celebrity CC57, Secondhand
14913 - PJ Eggle Linville Cutaway Elec/Acoustic
14914 - PJ Eggle Linville Electro Acoustic
14915 - PJ Eggle Parlour Electro Acoustic
10095 - RainSong BI-JM1000N2 Graphite Guitar
10038 - RainSong BI-WS1000N2 Black Ice Graphite
9821 - Rainsong CO-JM1000N2
9818 - Rainsong CO-WS1000N2
10086 - RainSong P14 Parlor
7974 - Rainsong WS1000N2 Graphite Guitar
15257 - Rainsong SMH Smokey Hybrid
15851 - Satori YD42 Acoustic, Vint Nat
8234 - Satori YD42EQ Electro Acoustic, Vint Nat
16427 - Takamine EF261S-AN, Gloss Antique Stain
16426 - Takamine EF341SC, Made in Japan
15376 - Takamine EF360GF Glen Frey Model
16074 - Takamine EG350SC LH Electro Acoustic
14685 - Takamine GD93CE Cutaway Electro Acoustic
16424 - Takamine GN10CE-NS, Natural
14622 - Takamine GN93CE Electro Acoustic Guitar
14264 - Takamine GX11MENS
14249 - Takamine P1DC Electro Acoustic Guitar
15494 - Tanglewood DBT SFCE PW
15492 - Tanglewood Discovery DBT SFCE BW
16998 - Tanglewood TLSFCE Liberty, Sunburst Used
14952 - Tanglewood TSF CE Black
14951 - Tanglewood TSF CE White
15866 - Tanglewood TSR 2 Masterdesign Electro
15787 - Tanglewood TVC X MP Electro Acoustic
15786 - Tanglewood TW28CE X OV
15583 - Tanglewood TW4 Winterleaf Super Folk BK
15584 - Tanglewood TW4 Winterleaf Super Folk BR
12669 - Tanglewood TW45 EG E Super Folk Cutaway
15498 - Tanglewood TW5 Winterleaf, Black
15497 - Tanglewood TW5 Winterleaf, Burgandy
15495 - Tanglewood TW5 Winterleaf, Whiskey Gloss
15982 - Tanglewood Sundance Perf Pro X45-AVE
15978 - Tanglewood X70 Electro Acoustic Guitar
16583 - Taylor 414CEN Nylon String Electro, Used
16982 - Taylor 614CE Electro Acoustic Guitar
15850 - Vintage Gordon Giltrap Signature
0000 - Yamaha - 11 Models in Stock Now

Classical Guitars

13021 - Admira Virtuoso Classical Guitar
8590 - Azahar Model 31A Classical Guitar
13864 - Breedlove Pursuit Nylon Electo Acoustic
15547 - David Pelter Handmade Classical Guitar
16564 - Gibson Chet Atkins Solid-B Nylon Used
7366 - Jose Ferrer 1/2 Classical Guitar
12622 - Jose Ferrer 4/4 Full-Size Classical
15585 - Manuel Rodriguez C3 Guitar, Secondhand
16036 - Mendieta Artizan W Classical Guitar
16034 - Mendieta Artizan Z Classical Guitar
16033 - Mendieta Artizan Z Classical Guitar
6776 - Mendieta Conservatoire B Classical
8507 - Mendieta Conservatoire C Classical
16045 - Mendieta Conservatoire D Classical
6775 - Mendieta Conservatoire ECE Elec Classic
16058 - Mendieta Estudiante Classica Classical
16057 - Mendieta Estudiante Classic 3/4 Pequeno
16037 - Mendieta Estudiante Flamenco Guitar
6779 - Mendieta Estudio P Classical Guitar
16051 - Mendieta Estudio P Pequeno 3/4 Size
6778 - Mendieta Estudio R Classical Guitar
6774 - Mendieta J Flamenco Guitar
16038 - Mendieta Professional Classica
8586 - Mendieta Professional Flamenco Guitar
15769 - Ortega Coral NY Nylon String Guitar
15719 - Ortega HoneySuite CE Nylon String Guitar
6913 - Raimundo 630E Electro Classical Guitar
5360 - Ramirez 130 Year Aniversary Classical
6029 - Ramirez 1NE Classical Guitar
15239 - Ramirez 2NCWE Classical Guitar
15236 - Ramirez 4NE Classical Guitar
12760 - Ramirez FL1 Flamenco Guitar
5644 - Ramirez George Harrison Model Classical
15237 - Ramirez RA Classical Guitar
15238 - Ramirez RB Classical Guitar
6027 - Ramirez S1 Classical Guitar
12761 - Ramirez SP Classical Guitar
16060 - Stagg C410 1/2 Size Classical Guitar
15290 - Stagg C430 3/4 Classical Guitar, Black
15289 - Stagg C430 3/4 Size Classical Guitar
15292 - Stagg C430 3/4 Size Classical Guitar Red
8353 - Stagg C530 3/4 Size Classical Guitar
16583 - Taylor 414CEN Nylon String Electro, Used
8350 - Westcoast Classical Guitar
8360 - Westcoast Slim Body Electro Classical
8352 - Westcoast Student 4/4 Classical, Natural
10999 - Westcoast Student 4/4 Classical, Red
14720 - Yamaha C40II Full Size Classical Guitar
16960 - Yamaha CG111S Classical Guitar
16269 - Yamaha CG170SA, Secondhand
14698 - Yamaha CS40 3/4 Size Classical Guitar
14721 - Yamaha CX40 Mark II Electro-Classical
12376 - Yamaha GL1 Guitalele
14755 - Yamaha SLG200N Silent Nylon, Nat
15620 - Yamaha SLG200N Silent Guitar TBS
15969 - Yamaha SLG200N Silent Guitar, Nylon,

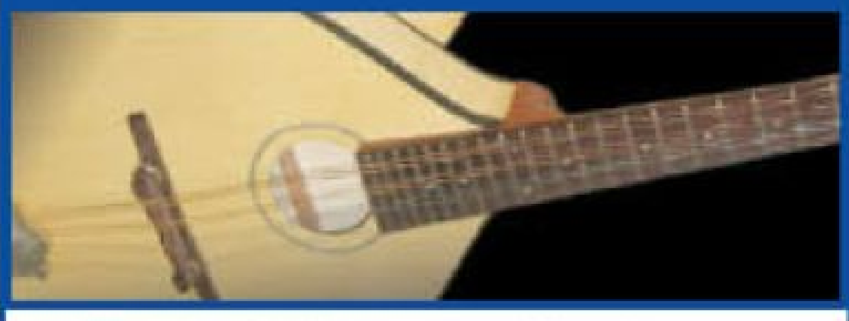
Ukuleles

16714 - Baton Rouge UR11C Concert Ukulele
16390 - Baton Rouge UR11S Soprano Ukulele
16227 - Baton Rouge UR4S Soprano Ukulele
16226 - Baton Rouge UR4TCE Electro Tenor LEFTY
10386 - Fender Mino'Aka Koa CE Concert Uke
13616 - Fender Rhalea Soprano Ukulele
16458 - Iberica SC Classic Sop Uke, Solid Acacia
16794 - Kala KA-15S-S Satin Spruce Soprano
15833 - Korala UKS32 Soprano Ukulele
13979 - Laka Soprano Ukulele with Case
15570 - Luna Malu Peace Soprano Ukulele
16835 - AA Maestro UC-IR-SB-C Concert El-Acoustic
16836 - Maestro UC-MR-SB-G Electro-Acoustic
16840 - Maestro UC-IR-SB-C Concert Electro-Acoustic
16837 - Maestro UT-IR-SB-C Ukulele
10372 - Magic Fluke M10 Concert Ukulele, Natural
15691 - Mahalo MR1 Soprano Ukulele, Black
12224 - Martin & Co C1K Koa Concert Ukulele
8128 - Martin S1 Soprano Ukulele with Gig Bag
13679 - Nukulele "Abbots Digit" Bottle Ukulele
13684 - Nukulele Autumn Gold Bottle Ukulele
13680 - Nukulele "Brown Ale" Bottle Ukulele
13681 - Nukulele "Helles Bier" Bottle Ukulele
13683 - Nukulele Lemonade Bottle Ukulele
13682 - Nukulele Slainte Bottle Ukulele
16104 - Ohana CK35G-5 5-String Concert Ukulele
8516 - Ohana PK25G Soprano Ukulele Pineapple
15956 - Ohana SK16 Soprano Ukulele
4711 - Ohana SK20 Soprano Ukulele Uke
13642 - Ohana SK23 Soprano Ukulele
4710 - Ohana SK25 Soprano Ukulele
15959 - Ohana SK35GS Solid Mahogany Gloss
9052 - Ohana SK38 Soprano Uke, Mahogany
9529 - Ohana SK50MG Soprano Ukulele
4714 - Ohana SK50WG Soprano Ukulele
4465 - Ohana TK20 Tenor Ukulele
9049 - Ohana TK35G5 5 String Tenor Uke
16063 - Ohana TK35G5 5 String Tenor Ukulele
12184 - Ohana TK50MG Tenor Ukulele
16103 - Ohana TK72 Tenor Ukulele
12390 - Ohana Soprano Uke Gig Bag
13311 - Ohana Concert Uke Gig Bag
13312 - Ohana Tenor Uke Gig Bag
16021 - Ohana CK80 Solid Cedar Top Concert Uke
10384 - Risa Electric Soprano Ukulele, UKS363MP
10385 - Risa UKS385MP Solid Concert Electro Uke
16965 - Stagg UB30 Mahogany Baritone Ukulele
16966 - Stagg UT30 Mahogany Tenor Ukulele
10426 - Uluru II Tenor Ukulele
16454 - Uluru Koa I All Solid Koa Soprano Uke
12376 - Yamaha GL1 Guitalele

6 String Electro Acoustics

10918 - Breedlove USA Gold D/SRE
13866 - Breedlove Discovery Concert CE, Sunburst
15224 - Breedlove Pursuit Concert Acoustic
16244 - Breedlove Pursuit Dreadnought Ebony
15887 - Breedlove Stage Dreadnought, Natural
10068 - Brian May Rhapsody Electro, Cherry
13911 - Cort AF510EOP Electro Acoustic Guitar
15993 - Crafter DE6N Electro Acoustic Guitar
4769 - EKO Ranger EQ Vintage Series, Black
16599 - Faith FKSE Naked Saturn Electro Acoustic
16783 - Faith FVBMB Blood Moon Venus Cutaway
16488 - Fender CC140SCE ElectroAcoustic, Natural
14730 - Fender CD100CE Left-Handed Cutaway
16487 - Fender CD140SCE, Cutaway Electro, Nat
16486 - Fender CD60SCE Black
16858 - Fender CD60SCE Mahogany
16861 - Fender CP140SE, Natural
16862 - Fender CP140SE Electro-Acoustic Sunburst
16889 - Fender PM1 E Ltd Adirondack Dreadnought
16872 - Fender PM1 E Ltd Adirondack Dreadnought
16514 - Fender PM3 Ltd Adirondack Triple-0 Mahog
16875 - Fender Sonoran SCE Dreadnought, Black
16876 - Fender Sonoran SCE Dreadnought SurfGreen
15525 - Fender Sonoran SCE, Candy Apple Red
6929 - Fender Stratacoustic Electro Acoustic Bk
16852 - Fender Tim Armstrong Hellcat Checker
16564 - Gibson Chet Atkins Solid Body Nylon Used
9700 - Gibson J45 Custom Electro Acoustic
15987 - Gretsch G5022CE Rancher Savannah Sunset
15985 - Gretsch G5031FT Rancher Dread., Sunburst
16750 - Ibanez AEL108TD NT 8-String, Natural
15600 - Jimmy Moon 0003 Acoustic, Secondhand
8091 - Jimmy Moon 0003CE Electro Acoustic
4555 - Jimmy Moon Bryan Adams Signature
9552 - LAG T300AE Electro Acoustic Guitar
15900 - Lakewood A22 Custom Made, Secondhand
14129 - Luna Heartsong Series Parlor Electro
14814 - Maestro Singa M-CSB-C All Solid Med Jumbo
15759 - Maestro Vera MR-CSB-A All Solid

Mandolin Family



8826 - Ashbury AM-325 Octave Mandola
15437 - Ashbury Celtic Octave Mandola
15442 - Ashbury Rathlin Irish Bouzouki
13527 - Blue Moon BB15 Bouzouki GR33001
15435 - Blue Moon Irish Bouzouki, Pear Shape
14741 - Fender Concert Tone Mandolin "A" 53S
9240 - Jimmy Moon A2 Acoustic Mandolin, Natural
15598 - Jimmy Moon A2 Acoustic Mandolin, Natural
4564 - Jimmy Moon Bouzouki, Nat
4553 - Jimmy Moon Standard Mandolin
16868 - Tanglewood TWM F VS E
16869 - Tanglewood TWM OS VSG Mandolin
8315 - Westcoast M20 Mandolin Sunburst
12347 - Westcoast M20S Mandolin Sunburst

12 Strings

16506 - Fender CD-140SCE 12-String, Natural
16713 - Lakewood M32 Custom 12-String, Used

Acoustic Amplification

5712 - AER Alpha - 40W, 1x8"
5193 - AER Alpha Plus - 50W, 1x8"
9494 - AER Compact 60 Mk III
5710 - AER Compact 60 Mk2 Hardwood - 60W, 1x8
14504 - AER Compact 60 SLOPE
5707 - AER Compact Classic Pro - 60W, 1x8"
5708 - AER Compact 60 Mk2 Mobile - 60W, 1x8
4945 - AER Compact XL - 200W, 2x8"
9028 - AER Domino 3 200w Watt Acoustic Amp
15913 - AER Tommy Emmanuel Signature Compact 60
13905 - Blackstar ID Core BEAM Bluetooth Amp
15917 - Boss Acoustic Singer Live Acoustic Amp
15918 - Boss Acoustic Singer Pro Acoustic Amp
10496 - Fender Acoustasonic 15 Acoustic Amp
16480 - Fender Acoustic 100 Acoustic Amp Combo
5286 - Fishman SA220 - 220w, 6x4"
15775 - Fishman SA220 - 220w, 6x4", Ex-Demo
6770 - Marshall AS100D - 50W+50W, 2x8"
13956 - Marshall AS50D - 50W, 2x8"
4976 - Roland AC33 30W - 1x5"
9358 - Roland AC33, Rosewood
11129 - Roland AC40 Acoustic Guitar Amplifier
6505 - Roland AC60 Acoustic Amp - 30w, 2x6.5
9383 - Roland AC60 Acoustic Guitar Combo, RW
5597 - Roland AC90 - 90W, 2x8"
16903 - Roland Cube Street 2.5+2.5W, 6.5
14371 - MOBILE AC Acoustic Chorus, Portable Amp
14941 - Tanglewood TBA5 5 Watt Acoustic Amp
16030 - Tanglewood TBA5 5W Acoustic Amp, Used
16469 - Vox VX50AG Acoustic Amp
10937 - Yamaha THR5A Acoustic Amp

Travel & Tenor Guitars

8846 - Ashbury AT-14 Tenor Guitar
8851 - Ashbury AT24 Tenor Guitar
15434 - Ashbury Tenor Guitar, Flamed Oak
16727 - Fender PMTE Travel Guitar, All Mahogany
16287 - JN Cigar Box Cask Hogshead Guitar
16286 - JN Cigar Box Puncheon Cask Guitar
14473 - Luna Safari Henna 3/4 Size Travel Guitar
14472 - Luna Safari Starry Night 3/4 Travel Guitar
15432 - Luna Safari Tattoo
16139 - Martin Ed Sheeran 3 ÷ Signature Edition
13856 - Martin Ed Sheeran X Signature, Used
5835 - Martin Backpacker Acoustic Travel Guitar
7320 - Martin LX1E, Electro Travel Guitar
14264 - Takamine GX11MENS
14628 - Tanglewood TWJLJ, Travel Guitar
14439 - Yamaha APXT2 Mini Electro Acoustic, Blk
14436 - Yamaha APXT2 Mini Electro Acoustic, Nat
16722 - Yamaha JR1 Acoustic Guitar, Natural
14522 - Yamaha SLG200S Silent Guitar, Steel
14615 - Dobro, circa 1975, Original Vintage
12737 - ResoVille Arlington MS12PG Single Cone
12730 - ResoVille Burbank MT12 Tri-Cone, Nickel
12732 - ResoVille Burbank MT12 Tri-Cone, Gold
12738 - ResoVille Lincolnwood WS12 Reso, Maple
12735 - ResoVille Parkville MS12 Single Cone Nic
12733 - ResoVille Riverdale MT14C Tri-Cone, Nick
13239 - ResoVille Stamford MS12 Single Cone Nic
7121 - Gitane Cigano GJ-0, Oval Hole, Natural
7122 - Gitane D500 Gypsy Jazz, Natural GR52066
7216 - Gitane DG255 Gypsy Jazz Guitar in Nat

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For full guitar details, pricing and photos, enter the number next to each guitar model into our SKU search facility on the website.

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